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カドカワBOOKS

Lord of the Hundred Demons

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- Volume 3 -
Act 4 – Act 5

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【ACT 4】

PRELUDE TO THE ENCOUNTER

Chapter 39

The Inspection of the Living Fires in the Veil of the Night

The sun was at its peak.

The wind sweeping across the eastern continent was rather dry.

With sparse, short grass growing on it, the land that could neither be called a field or a wasteland continued as far as their eyes could see.

At times there were mountains, forests or lakes on either side of their path but as if the nature itself was trying not to get in the way of that group, it was never on their path.

The group of demon lords who had gotten caught up in the torrential flow of the era.

While clinging onto a slight favorable wind in the middle of that counter-current, they were treading the path towards Lemuse.

Those people ended up encountering a [certain being] during the first morning after they had left the Duchy of Neuce Gauss.

Right before the morning was the dawn, right before the dawn was the night.

Before they had that encounter, their group first went through that night.



The first night was spent at the waterside.

They were at the edge of a lake which was in the middle of a river with a very gentle flow.

Having sucked in enough moisture, the land around that lake was abundant in

vegetation.

If this had been in the middle of a desert, it would have definitely been known as an oasis.

It was located at a place slightly detached from the peddler's highway that, from ancient times, had peddler's crossing over it to ply their craft no matter whether they had to mix their sweat with their blood.

Since there were footprints of several people in that area, it couldn't be called a completely wild land. However, when seen from the eyes of the demon lords who wanted a place that was neither too far from the main road nor too close so that they could hide themselves without seeming suspicious.

For such demon lords, that place was quite convenient.

Several of them stood guard as the others slept off to clear the fatigue that had piled up over their long and fast escape.

“Merea, you properly awake?”

“Of course I’m awake. What’s the point of the lookout falling asleep, Salman?”

At that time, while the other demon lords were greedily catching up on their sleep, there were people who were still awake sitting around a small light.

There were two people.

One of them was sitting with his back to the tree while the other one was slowly walking towards that place.

—They were Merea and Salman.

“It was just a joke. —At times like this, don’t you ever feel lost on how to call out to someone?”

The light — the fire was very slightly burning.

Incidentally, that wasn’t a normal flame.

【Living Fire】 , 【Living Flame】.

In other words, it was the mysterious fire created by the <Flame Emperor> Lilium.

The light that was lighting up Merea's face was a mass of fire that was slightly smaller than a fist, with no visible source for that fire, it just lay there next to Merea's feet.

The flame brought forth by the <Flame Emperor> which had a life of its own, an exceedingly mysterious and extremely convenient flame.

Since it used her peculiar mana and source as the fuel, it did not require any firewood and could continue to burn.

Not to mention, if it felt any presences around, it would by itself throw itself into the lake and hide itself.

While it was flickering the small living flame grew arms and legs and quickly ran over to the water side. Although it did hesitate for a moment but then it did throw its body into the water.

With a *shuuu* sound, flame quickly got put out.

Although it reacted to Salman approaching Merea but by the time Salman reached that place, the flame had already ended it's fleeting life.

“Hey, isn't that a little sad? Also, I feel extremely guilty”

“Stop it, don't say any more... I'll end up crying”

As such, the flame eventually completely died out and since the living flames were ones who put themselves out, underneath the bush nearby, there were more such living flames hiding in reserve which would then come out and take the earlier flame's place.

Although the figure of those living flames giving out a feeling of waiting for their turn to come up were sort of cute but at the same time, it also gave the person watching an indescribable sense of sorrow.

“More like, isn't it fine to just go back to that hole and hide there...?”

"They apparently choose the closest option... Also, if its a situation where their internal mana is decreasing, at the end as if to let a flower bloom for the last time, they choose the flashiest way to go"

"Are they a warrior or something?"

Salman pinched his brows with a gesture as if he were trying to suppress a headache.

Incidentally, Lilium herself, when she saw that living flame jump into the water,

"She was seriously laughing hard, wasn't she"

"Lilium really looked like a demon to me"

She had been laughing while holding onto her stomach.

She herself had made those flames and she had ordered them to take those actions, that was something they both understood.

They also knew that those orders were more or less correct.

However, when they thought of Lilium having burst out laughing hysterically after seeing the flame run to the water and jump into it, Merea and Salman couldn't help but feel a sense of fear towards her.

"I've decided never to go against Lilium"

"It's possible that since she has been together with those flames since she was an infant, it might not be something strange for her..."

In fact, it might just be a form of entertainment like being able to manipulate your own techniques well..."

As Merea answered with a slight laugh, Salman reached them and similarly lowered himself onto the ground.

While greeting Salman, Merea noticed that a really nice fragrance grazed his nostrils.

Wondering what the fragrance was, Merea turned once again to Salman and noticed that he was gripping two golden cups.

The nice fragrance seemed to be wafting from inside those cups.

“Check these golden cups out. Extremely bad taste huh”

“That smell of gold mixed in with that nice fragrance is just drifting around now”

Saying so, Salman hands over one of the cups to Merea who takes it while bitterly smiling while he replies.

The living flames which were giving out a faint light while the curtain of night falls, that faint light was reflected on the golden cups.

The current situation had the feeling of a break during their journey and the atmosphere had quite the fantastical feeling to it but the impact was immediately reduced by half when he noticed that the living flame which had grown arms and legs had started to do bending exercises.

Merea looked into the cup that Salman had handed him and wondered exactly what was inside it.

“It smells sweet and sour”

“Ah, it’s called Camir Lemonade. It’s a drink that was the speciality of the town that I lived in for quite a long time. Basically you take the alcohol called camir that was the speciality of that town and mix it with commonly available lemonade—well, the sourness has to be on the higher side—and make a cocktail out of it, in the end we just add some spices”

“I see, I see”

“The Camir alcohol, as the name suggests is made from a the camir fruit but that in itself is extremely sweet. It’s fine to open a bottle and drink it as it is when it’s as a souvenir but it’s not something that can be had as a regular drink. That’s why the alcohol is mixed in with something that is very sour and mixed in with other flavors”

“Heee, you’re quite knowledgeable about it huh”

“Haha, told you I lived there quite long didn’t I. So then, when we stopped over at

Neuce Gauss, I happened to notice it and decided to buy it with the leftover money. —Keep it a secret from the money-grubber okay?”

With his sandy hair fluttering in the wind, Salman laughed and then he brought his own golden cup to his mouth and took a sip.

Seeing that, Merea readied himself and brought his own cup to his lips and took a sip.

“Sweet!!! Sour!!!”

“Hahaha! I made yours considerably more sour”

“You’re not that different from Lilium!”

“The one who is negligent is at fault. —Ah, that was just an imitation of the money-grubber. He hasn’t said it yet but seems like something he may say”

Salman slapped Merea’s shoulder with a mischievous grin.

Merea shut his mouth from the sheer sourness however, the camir lemonade had a strange deliciousness to it that made it hard to stop drinking so he, once again, brought the cup to his lips.

Sweetness and sourness.

The sweetness loosened all the fatigue in the body and cleared it up, the sourness helped carry the sweetness to every corner of the body along with a wonderful warmth.

A warm sigh naturally leaked out of him.

“How is it? Once you get used to it, it’s tasty right?”

“I won’t deny that”

“You’re really not very honest huh”

Salman, once again, laughed.

“What about the others?”

“They’re all fast asleep. They were all probably really sleepy”

Salman motioned towards the depth of the trees that were lined up around, with his chin.

The vegetation blocked their view so they couldn’t see it properly but it seemed that the rest of the demon lords were sleeping soundly on the other side.

If they strained their ears, they could probably hear the sounds of at least one sleeping person amongst the chorus of insects.

However, Merea believed Salman so he didn’t really bother to check up on them.

Instead he spoke to Salman.

“What about Salman?”

“I was able to sleep enough. Thanks to you being on lookout. That’s why, I’ll change with you so, go get some sleep”

“—I’m fine even if I don’t sleep. That’s how I’ve been made”

“Seems like it. The more I look at you, the more I think so”

At Merea’s nonchalant words, Salman smiled bitterly and didn’t try to deny it.

“But, it’s not like you can do with no sleep at all right?”

“Well—yeah. If it were on a daily basis then, as expected, the fatigue would be prominent”

“In that case, go reset that day counter of yours. There aren’t any pursuers as of now so it’s fine”

Merea looked at Salman, trying to figure out whether he had rested properly or not.

If he had even a little bit of fatigue remaining, he planned on continuing his lookout duty.

However, Salman didn't look like he would give up easily.

It would probably be better to change according to their original plan.

Since Merea couldn't see any fatigue in Salman, he decided to listen to him.

"Got it. I'll go get some shut eye then"

"Yeah, go do that"

"Then, here"

Merea handed over the golden cup, which he had drained in no time, along with a small twig that he had in his other hand to Salman.

It was a strange twig with leaves wrapped around one end in the shape of a dumpling.

"If you use that to play with the living flames, you won't even notice the time going by. It's your loss if the leaves burn"

"You're like a genius who comes up with strange ways to play huh"

"If you're too occupied with that you'll get negligent with your lookout duty"

Like Salman did a while back, Merea also imitated Shaw's merchant-like air and gave an exaggerated bow.

"That much huh. --Ah, but this is quite fun huh. --Nhnn, damn, they're quite nimble"

With that Salman had a golden cup with camir lemonade in one hand and Merea's specially made twig in the other hand and immediately started to play with the living flame near his feet.

When he brought the leaf dumplings near the living flame, it would grow arms and legs and jump around trying to burn it.

It was like using a foxtail to play with a cat.

“...However, even this guy will eventually throw himself into the waterside...”

“Stop making me sad right before I go to sleep”

“Oh, sorry about that”

Salman laughed lightly. At that moment, the leaf dumpling was burned by the living flames.

Seeing that, Merea couldn't help but laugh happily.

“Well then, good night”

“Yeah, sleep tight”

He walked off into the depths where everyone was sleeping.

Salman watched Merea's retreating figure as he put another leaf dumpling at the end of the twig.

However, at the moment that Merea's figure could no longer be seen, Salman had a thoughtful expression on his face.

“...”

For but a moment, Salman felt that he saw a strange fragility in Merea's figure.

Even though he was that overwhelming on the battlefield, at that point, he looked like he would just melt into his surroundings.

He did not know the reason for it.

However, he felt extremely anxious at that fact.

Finally, he could no longer see Merea's figure and even his footsteps could no longer be heard.

He could only hear the chorus of insects from the depths of the bushes as well as the

popping sounds from the living flame near his feet.



The veil of the night lifted and it welcomed the early morning.

It was still the time where the smell of the dawn was still drifting about.

One girl woke up before anyone else and trying her best not to wake anyone else up, she quietly stood up.

It was the girl who single-handedly supported them all and was the main reason they were able to reach the Duchy of Neuce Gauss, the red-haired <Flame Emperor> Lilium.

Seeing the sunlight shining through the trees, she quietly walked towards the waterside.



“Salman”

“Ah, you’re the first one huh”

Next to a big tree that was standing near the water’s edge, a man with sandy hair was sitting down.

He was a young man with handsome features.

“Well, the look in your eyes is bad though”

“That’s quite the horrible thing to say first thing in the morning”

“Don’t worry, I properly complemented you... internally”

“Say that out loud...”

While joking with each other they measured the distance between them.

Though, ever since they left the Duchy of Neuce Gauss, the distance between the

demon lords had closed up quite a bit.

Lilium, while listening to the reply of Salman who sounded exasperated, saw that he was holding onto a strangely shaped twig in his hand.

“What is that?”

“Hm? —Ah, that’s something Merea came up with in order to play with your living flames”

After having said that, Salman immediately showed her the way to play with the living flames.

Salman had also gotten quite used to the living flames and they continued with their retreating battle.

“Hmmm. —I don’t quite get it but, [He] is almost out of mana so is going to disappear soon you know”

“Ahh!? Seriously!? —O, oi!! This guy is my lifetime rival you know!? There were many others who would just jump into the water or some who would enthusiastically pile earth onto themselves and disappear so there were many problematic times you know!?

However, this guy alone was able to keep up with my pace and while taking breaks in between, was able to duke it out with me!!

He is a friend now! For someone like that to just disappear—”

“Ah, it’s finished”

“Ahh!!”

Shuu

With a sound much softer than when they jumped into the water, the living flame near Salman’s feet, faded away.

Being blown on by a slight breeze that came in from between the gaps of the trees, as they thought that it was fluttering, it completely disappeared.

In the next moment, Lilium noticed tears in Salman's eyes.

"Eh, wait, hold on, that's kinda scary"

She exaggeratedly pulled back.

"Y, you, you! That guy, even like that, was alive...!"

"Ahh... , Well, it's not like I don't understand your feelings but well, you get used to it"

For a moment, Salman looked at Lilium's face and was lost for words.

As soon as she said, you get used to it, Lilium seemed to purposely keep her face impassive and emotionless.

Seeing that, Salman realised.

"Is that so... you were actually sad as well huh... You also had that period when you felt sad when you saw them kill themselves"

"Well not I find it to be rather amusing though"

"As I thought, you're a demon!!"

"I get it, so just go back there. It will take some time for everyone to wake up and finish preparations so you'll still be able to take a nap before we leave"

Lilium stretched her hand out to Salman and as soon as he took it, she pulled to lift him up and then with a, "Shoo, shoo" she drove him away.

"I'll take over the lookout duty so, come on, go now"

"Parting with the living flames is hard!"

With that parting remark, Salman walked off towards everyone else.

Lilium, who was left behind, looked into the hole nearby and while gazing at the leftover living flames,

“Good job. See you later”

While speaking quietly, she watched the living flames disappear till the very end.



After Salman left, Lilium, who was left behind, went over to the waterside and lightly washed her face and washed the dirt out of her hair.

Although she couldn't take a bath but this much was definitely okay.

The water itself was clear and beautiful which made her want to jump right in, however,

“If someone walks over then it's a little...”

Even if the one walking over were an ally, if it were a man it would be the worst.

“Ahh, although unexpectedly, I might be fine if it were Merea who walked over”

She did not mean that she was happy being seen by him.

Merea seemed to have a rather thin presence as a man compared to other men which made her feel that it might be fine if it were him.

She meant it in a way that she probably won't be perturbed by being seen by him.

“Well, that really isn't a compliment now is it?”

Let's not tell him, so she thought.

For a while after that Lilium continued to wash her face and then having washed it all off, she finally raised her face.

Since her hair was long, if she washed her hair while standing up she would end up getting her clothes wet so she bent down and put her face close to the water's surface and washed her face and hair.

Having finally finished washing, she raised her face.

“Fuuu”

With a satisfied sigh, she turned back.

“Gyau”

A huge black lump was reflected in her eyes.

“—”

Lilium almost screamed.

She had no idea when it managed to get that close but, with a small waterside separating them, on the other side was a...

—

Black dragon.

Chapter 40

Admiration, Wonder, Grief

It was a dragon.

A land dragon (Reirnote).

Four legs, black scales, a thick, long and strong looking tail as well as peculiar aerodynamic wings.

A radical form that would leave an impression of strength and sharpness.

“Gyafu—”

—Compared to that, quite the idiotic cry.

For a moment she thought that idiotic cry was slightly cute but then the rest of its features immediately showed that it was, unmistakably, a land dragon.

Even if she could use techniques, she would have to be prepared for death if it recognized her as an enemy, that was the kind of creature it was.

“—”

Matching that cry, Lilium almost screamed out “Gyaaa” but she covered her mouth with her hands and somehow managed to hold that scream down.

As expected, she hesitated to raise a voice.

A woman’s scream really could resound after all and it may just end up jolting the land dragon after all.

Not to mention, there were still people on the other side who were sleeping soundly.

If the first thing they heard, the moment they woke up was a woman’s scream then it

would definitely end up being a horrendous way to wake up.

“Pu—”

Around 10 seconds passed with her in the state of holding her scream down.

“—Ha!”

After watching each other for a while, Lilium finally let her breath go.

Her desire to scream seemed to have disappeared and she finally dropped her hands from her mouth and spoke up.

“D, don’t startle me like that!”

In the end, she still spoke in a rather loud voice.

“Ah—”

Well, it probably didn’t echo that much.

She decided to be satisfied with the fact that, at least it wasn’t a scream.



The reason Lilium managed to speak to it in that way was because, in those 10 seconds she figured out, from its eyes and gestures that it meant her no harm.

In fact, it even seemed to have a rather intimate air around it.

As far as Lilium was concerned, that was an extremely strange situation.

There had never been a situation where she had even faced a land dragon from the front, let alone have any as acquaintances.

The truth of the matter was that, the reason the land dragon meant her no harm was because the land dragon remembered having seen Lilium.

Incidentally, that land dragon was the one that Merea had saved in the basement of

the Sherwood firm from the fatal draconic disease.

Lilium, on the other hand, had been sleeping during that situation that had happened in the firm since she had overused her living flames technique.

Although she heard about what happened from them later on but she hadn't actually seen it.

Which was why, she did not notice that the land dragon in front of her was the same land dragon that came out in Merea's story.

“Gya”

The land dragon raised a happy cry and then immediately stretched its neck and looked around restlessly.

It looked like it was looking for something.

“Are you searching for something?”

“Gyau”

The purpose of that land dragon was to find the human who had helped it.

Which was why it had chased him and arrived at that point.

After smelling the smell of that human from his cast off clothes in the Sherwood firm, it chased after him based solely on that smell, though it had some troubles but it somehow managed to reach the current vicinity.

Seeing Lilium at that place was the first time that the land dragon had the feeling of, “It's definitely this place”.

The land dragon remembered seeing Lilium before.

There was no way that it would forget about Lilium who was sleeping near the person who it desperately wanted to find.

The dragon tribe had intelligence that far outstripped humans.

Although that land dragon was young, it still had a really high intelligence.

“Gya”

“What?”

“Gyau”

“Speak human language”

“Gya, Gyau...”

Lilium as well, if she had but 10 seconds, she would return to her usual self.

Having gotten back to how she was, having retrieved her innate vibrant air, she spoke even to the land dragon how she would to anyone else.

Although they had a language barrier and she didn't precisely know what the other side was talking about but, since the other side was a smart dragon she could somehow make out what it was trying to say with the tone of its voice.

It was to the point where she even thought that the land dragon may even understand the meaning of human languages.

In contrast, the dragon seemed to be a little pressured by Lilium's air.

Facing that woman with crimson hair, who looked directly into its eyes, the land dragon unconsciously started stepping back.

Seeing the land dragon like that, Lilium spoke,

“Ah... Sorry. I'm sorry i spoke that strongly”

She saw a childishness in that dragon.

At the same time, she felt a sense of guilt as one would feel when they unconsciously scold a child.

Lilium herself felt rather startled with how she had reacted and ended up wondering

whether that reaction was the right one or not.

“Seriously... why is a human consoling a dragon...?”

She realised that they would make no progress in this way.

It seemed that the land dragon had some business in that area and coincidentally, there was a weirdo among them who could speak dragon tongue.

Although it was slightly early, since it was an emergency situation, she had no other choice but to wake him up.

With those thoughts, While heaving a sigh, Lilium floated a gentle smile on her face to calm the land dragon down.

She looked like a sister who would always end up listening to what her brother wanted or like a woman who got hooked by a good-for-nothing gigolo that she could not get rid of.

“Well whatever, —Just wait for a bit. There is a weirdo who can speak dragon tongue so I’ll go get him now”

“Gya?”

“It’s fine, I’ll properly go and get him. So, you just stay over there. If you come with me, then everyone’s hearts might just jump out of their chests”

At the land dragon’s questioning look, she spoke up.

There was definitely no way that she could bring it along with her.

The demon lords who are confident in their strength may end up collapsing on the ground from fear and not to mention the demon lords who have no confidence in their strength, they may just end up fainting.

While thinking that, as Lilium turned around and walked away, she heard the sound of something heavy scraping across gravel.

“Wait there”

“Gya, Gya...”

Turning towards the land dragon which tried to nonchalantly follow along, she strongly told it off.

As if it was overpowered by her tone, the land dragon quietly sat down in that place.

“Seriously... , just play with that”

Saying that, Lilium created a large living flame from her right hand and threw that towards the land dragon.

It was a living flame that hopped along.

It was considerably larger than the one that was used as a light during the lookout and it could even be called to be for a dragon.

Having realised that the living flame that was meant for light had been turned into a plaything by those [two idiots] , she tried it out and threw it towards the dragon.

“—Yup, you’re basically just like those two huh? I’m glad that you are easy to handle”

She was happy and sad.

Lilium couldn’t help but heave a sigh along with a bitter smile, seeing that land dragon happily playing with the living flame.



Leaving the land dragon that was happily playing with the living flame behind, Lilium advanced into the thicket where the demon lords were sleeping.

While advancing, she could hear quiet whispering voices.

It seemed like there were already some who had woken up.

Predicting that, she moved the exceptionally large leaf in front of her aside and finally reached the spot where everyone was resting.

“Hey, listen up—”

While speaking up, Lilium turned her gaze towards the group and in the next moment,

“—”

What entered into her line of sight was,

“Wh, wh, wh, what’s the matter, Lilium-sama?”

The sight of Marisa trying to place the sleeping Merea’s head onto her lap.



Trying to put both her hands on Merea’s head, the one who had stiffened in that pose was the beauty in maid clothing.

Next to her was a delicate young woman with twinkling eyes, Aiz. Along with them, having already started playing with Merea’s snow-white hair, making braids out of it were the blue haired twins.

“...”

Lilium decided to leave the twins be and turned her gaze towards Marisa, who had gotten stiff in the state of preparing to give Merea a lap pillow. — “What are you doing” is what Lilium’s long silence seemed to say.

“Well you see, I figured that Merea-sama would be inconvenienced since he didn’t have a pillow and well, if I was going to provide a pillow then I might as well use my own thighs—I have quite a lot of confidence in the softness of my thighs after all, so you see...”

Marisa, who usually never let her cold expression change and remained impassive most of the time, might have been that flustered for the first time.

Same for the fact that her face was quite red.

While Lilium looked on at that unexpected side of Marisa, she suddenly noticed a lump of cloth rolling around near them.

That was a [pillow].

That was probably the pillow that Merea was using.

Marisa had removed that pillow from under Merea's head for her own convenience.

Which would mean that her excuse of, [I figured that Merea-sama would be inconvenienced since he didn't have a pillow] was just...

“...”

“...”

Marisa kept looking all over the place. It was extremely clear that she was flustered.

Aiz, who was next to her, quickly tried to hide the pillow behind herself.

—I see, she's an accomplice.

She already knew that Aiz had a strong curiosity and she was probably just interested to see someone give a lap pillow, or something of that sort.

Actually, if it was turned around, it could be that Aiz was the one who innocently suggested that to Marisa in the first place.

It was the general opinion of the demon lords that, despite having such a delicate form, that girl was surprisingly bold.

“...Haa”

First, she couldn't help but sigh once.

In that time, Lilium reviewed her impression of Marisa once more.

“...You're surprisingly [normal] huh”

“I, is that so?”

Looking at Marisa, who still had a slightly red face, Lilium spoke up.

“I don’t mean it in a bad sense. If anything, I’m complimenting you”

Although Lilium had thought that she was an extremely unique kind of maid but it might just be that, when it came to certain things, she may just be the most normal.

—Well, that maiden-like response may just be the kind of [reaction] she, as a demon lord would make.

She knew that Marisa had one-sidedly sworn her allegiance to Merea.

Although she didn’t know the precise reason for it but, she did guess that the reason originated from the fact that she was a demon lord.

Although she wasn’t close enough to her to ask such things but, after the current sudden situation, she felt that the distance between the two had shortened considerably.

—Not to mention, it feels like it’s not only a sense of loyalty that she feels.

Seeing her like that, Lilium couldn’t help but think that.

When she realised that, she felt a faint discomfort deep within herself, however since it was too faint, she herself did not know what that feeling actually was.

So she decided to ignore that feeling and instead, spoke to Marisa in a teasing tone.

“—At any rate, you’re rather bold huh?”

“!!”

Hearing Lilium’s words which were accompanied by a grin, Marisa’s body bounced back.

Merea’s head, which had had half lifted up at some point, was let go and it hit the ground with a dull sound.

“Ah”

“Ah—”

Marisa's and Lilium's dumbfounded voices overlapped and in the next instant, with very natural movements, Marisa quickly picked up Merea's head and placed it on her lap.

“I, I humbly apologise! A, ahhh! What have I done...!”

While looking greatly flustered, she gently stroked the part of his head that hit the ground.

As a result, it had ended in the kind of situation that she had wanted but she, herself, was probably not thinking about that anymore.

As she watched that scene of Marisa showing her maiden-like cute appearance, Lilium suddenly remembered the reason she had gone back and once more spoke up.

“—Sorry for disturbing you but I want to borrow Merea for a while”



While Lilium explained about that land dragon, along with Merea, the other demon lords also woke up one after the other and it was decided that they would all go to see that land dragon.

Merea felt a little awkward to leave the other demon lords behind while he, who had the highest power amongst all the demon lords went on ahead. Since it was possible that when he went his separate way something bad may happen.

That being said, from the point of view of powerless demon lords, they would be at the epitome of fear to go and stand in front of a land dragon but after being told by Lilium that it probably didn't mean them any harm, they resolved themselves to follow along.

Being guided through the thicket by Lilium, Shaw who run up next to Merea, suddenly spoke up.

He already had pressed his finger onto his forehead as if he were suppressing a headache.

“You know? I feel nothing but bad premonitions about this. I’ll say this once more but, from what Ms. Lilium has said so far, it is definitely that land dragon you know”

“It’s no longer a premonition huh... you just said definitely...”

Merea unconsciously hung his head at Shaw’s forced words. Similarly, Merea was in mind to accept what Shaw had said.

“I have a question for you Merea. Do you think that, that land dragon peacefully left the firm?

In the first place, Zaido wouldn’t have let merchandise like that dragon just run away without any resistance.

Since he’s also a merchant like me, if it wasn’t a large issue, he wouldn’t have let it go”

“Yeah...”

Shaw placed his elbow on Merea’s shoulder and while leaning on him while tottering, he continued speaking.

“So, if that land dragon is the same land dragon with black scales then Zaido may have reached a point where [he had no choice] but to let the land dragon escape right?

—If it was to the point where the firm had no other choice, so I wonder what kind of situation it had ended up in”

“...”

Merea imagined the situation but he hesitated to tell Shaw the conclusion he had arrived at.

“Ahh... , weakened by the fatal draconic disease, unable to have food pass through its throat and even unable to have water pass through it. However, that was healed by a certain someone. The moment it was healed, since it was not able to eat properly until then, it would end up feeling rather hungry.

At that point, mysteriously, there is a lot of food lying around all over the place”

Shaw suddenly started speaking rather dramatically.

Merea remembered that the basement of the Sherwood firm was full of many kinds of

food which were stocked up.
He felt cold sweat spout out.

“Just right, let’s eat the food around there. —A dragon does not consider the profit and loss of humans. If it had been an adult dragon, it may have considered it but this one seemed to be rather young. —Ahh..., Uwaa...”

Shaw’s speech did not continue till the end.

Having imagined it by himself, he suddenly had a sunken expression.

Merea felt the weight that Shaw had placed on his shoulder get heavier and he support him in order to console him.

“What exactly are you doing, you two?”

Lilium looked back and asked with an amazed expression.

“O, there it is”

When Lilium turned back, she raised her voice and pointed.

In front of her was,

“Ahh, as expected, that’s the one”

Although it had gotten considerably bigger since the time when they had seen it in the basement of the firm but Merea did not mistake it.

Scales that shone black like obsidian, with a certain noble feeling and pupils which he remembered well.

Merea who had know many sky dragons while he had been living on the mountain top of Lindholm sacred mountain, knew that dragons, like humans, had faces that had their own individuality.

Having heard Merea clearly say that it was definitely the same dragon, Shaw who had been leaning on his shoulder,

“Hasn’t it become really large... did it become that large from having eaten all the merchandise from the firm’s basement?

—Aaaaahhh..., uwwaaaaahhh...!... We’re definitely going to be at a loss now!!!!”

While collapsing on the ground, Shaw was unable not to raise a cry of grief.

Chapter 41

Hope in the Right Hand, Anxiety in the Left Hand

The black land dragon was playing around with the living fire.

As the living fire ran around its feet, the dragon happily jumped around trying to catch it. It looked more like a dog than a dragon.

“If we watch it doing things like this, it’s rather cute huh”

The demon lords who were watching it from the shadow of the tall grass, floated warm and happy expressions on their faces.

When Salman expressed his simple impression, all the demon lords could not help but nod and agree.

—But.

While the demon lords were watching the cuteness of the land dragon, in the next instant a tragedy happened to the living fire playing around with the land dragon.

“Gyau!”

The land dragon who raised a happy cry, shook its right limb as if to poke it lightly and ended up as a direct hit to the living flame.

That blow was accompanied by a violent wind and the human head sized living flame was quickly turned to dust.

“Gya...”

As if to say that it had done it unintentionally, the land dragon just stood stiff with its mouth agape.

It turned its head around and tried looking at its surroundings, rather restlessly but

as anyone would expect, the living flame was no longer there.

Then, as if it had finally accepted that it had blown away the living flame,

“Gyau—”

It heaved a large sigh.

The demon lords who had seen that from the shadow of the tall grass,

“Oi, hold up. ——Oi... Oi! If it plays around that much wouldn’t we die?!”

“Wait! I’m pretty confident that if I was played around with like that, I would die in an instant! I want to buy peace of mind with the power of money but does the dragon tribe even take bribes?!”

“I’m pretty certain it would have no effect at all...”

“Ahh! This is exactly why I don’t like species other than humans! The power of money is absolutely useless with them!”

With fear clear in their voices, their bodies were clearly trembling.



“Alright, I’m off. ——This is probably my fault anyway”

At that time, Merea took the initiative and set out.

He pushed the tall grass aside with his hands and took a few steps ahead.

The land dragon as well, which had had its attention solely on the living flame seemed to have finally gotten aware of the presences of the demon lords in the surroundings.

Although it did not move, it turned an inquisitive gaze towards the tall grass.

Before any of the other demon lords could stop him, Merea advanced steadily out of the tall grass.

“You followed after us huh. —Is your body fine already?”

He walked into the line of sight of the land dragon and when it had noticed his figure,

“Ngyaa!!”

It raised a high pitched cry and happily stood up.

“Gyau~!”

With its body trembling with joy, like a dog which had its leash removed, it rushed towards Merea.

If it had been a dog then he could just warmly smile and wait for it but the one right now wasn't at a size where you could call it a dog.

When looked at from a third person's point of view, it looked like Merea's tiny human body was about to be run over by that huge land dragon.

A few of the demon lords became flustered and raised their bodies from the tall grass but most of them could do nothing but watch that terrifying spectacle with their mouths agape.

“O, oi, calm down!”

“Gya! Gyau! Gya gya!!”

However, Merea was not run over.

The rush of the land dragon which could have easily toppled over a huge tree was stopped by Merea with a single hand.

He took that rush head-on and stepped back a few steps and very nonchalantly received the rush.

Once again, the jaws of the demon lords hung low.

“..”

Merea himself, did not notice the thoughts of the other demon lords and was

scratching his head with a troubled expression, looking at the land dragon which was running around him refusing to calm down at all.

“—Wh, what should I do...?”

In the end, Merea looked to the others for a way to resolve that situation.

Though, the demon lords who could not even properly understand the current situation, could of course not come up with a resolution.

Of course, the answer to that was,

“As if I would know!!” so they retorted.

They wanted an explanation to the current situation before anything else.



After a while, when the land dragon finally calmed down a little, Merea started his explanation.

With his body swaying back and forth from the land dragon pushing its nose into his back and stomach, he began his explanation from what had happened at Shaw's firm.

Although he had spoken about it to a few demon lords during the journey but it's not like every one of them knew.

“At any rate, this is troubling...”

After he finished explaining, Merea floated a troubled expression as he scratched his face.

Merea himself did not think that it would chase after him.

He had no plans to demand gratitude nor did he have any plans to demand any compensation when he had used the blood of the Medicine King (Carla Nazar).

It was a simple whim of his.

Although he did sympathise with it a little but it's not like he had any exaggerated

feelings like good will towards it.

Even then, if he were to specify a reason, it was mainly because he wanted to return some of the favor he had gotten from Shaw over their entire journey together since he had relied on Shaw quite a bit.

Even though those were the intentions, the situation seems to have taken a rather strange turn.

As the person who was solely responsible for having caused this situation, Merea felt a strong sense of guilt and felt like reprimanding himself.

“Without a need to guess, he most probably stood out quite a bit huh”

Merea sighed softly as he stroked the land dragon’s forehead.

At that point, from among the demon lords who cautiously gathered around the land dragon, one of them answered Merea.

“It would depend on the path it took. However, there are still no signs of anyone chasing after the land dragon so, there is probably no problem at all. —Not to mention, if someone sees this large a land dragon running around, then they would not try to get close to it out of fear”

It was Shaw.

His gaze was still nailed onto the land dragon but he seems to have finally regained some of his composure was able to speak up.

“Why not just ask it?”, said Shaw as he pointed his finger at the land dragon and urged Merea.

“That’s true too huh”

Merea nodded to Shaw’s suggestion and then,

“—■■■, ■■”

He spoke in dragon tongue.

The other demon lords could not recognize those sounds as words but when they saw that the land dragon reacted to the words the Merea spoke, it was clear that he was actually speaking in dragon tongue.

Although they wondered what kind of language it was, they patiently waited for Merea to translate what the dragon was saying.

“■■, ■■”

Merea once again spoke in dragon tongue.

“Gya, Gyau”

The land dragon tilted its head while it answered Merea's question.

“■■■, ■■”

“Gyau”

Unlike the land dragon's cry, Merea's dragon tongue was slightly heavier and the transition between words seemed to be smoother.

The land dragon on the other hand, had a very easy to understand cry which was hard to tell whether it was just a cry or whether it was an actual language.

“Gyau”

“■■■”

“Gya, Gyau”

“■■■■ Gyau”

“Ah, it got mixed up” said someone.

As if he were tired, Merea switched his language from dragon tongue to that of humans and slumped his shoulders.

“You really suck at dragon tongue huh... , Why is an actual dragon worse than me...?!”

With his white hair swaying, Merea sighed loudly and spoke.

“Gya!”

Even though Merea said that, the land dragon replied cheerfully.

“I wonder if there are slight differences between land dragons (Reirnote) and sky dragons (Teishia)…”

He raised his face and looked at the sky while he spoke.

The place he was looking at the sky, he was wondering whether he might be able to see the figure of a sky dragon but the only thing that entered his line of sight were clouds.

“So, what did he say? ——Is it fine with he? Should it be she?”

“Ahh, it’s he. ——And, he says, [I don’t quite know]”

Merea lowered his gaze from the sky and while looking over at Shaw who had asked the question, he spoke up.

“Well now…”

As Shaw shrugged his shoulders, the other demon lords shrugged as well.

However, Merea’s speech had not ended there.

“Just, as Shaw had expected, there didn’t seem to be anyone chasing after him. He is a dragon after all, if you consider their perception ability, there is no mistake on that part.

It seems like, until he contracted the fatal draconic disease he seems to have been living in the wild”

At those words, he heaved another sigh.

However this time, it was not a sigh of discouragement but of relief instead.

“Well then, for starters let’s just say that it’s fine. ——Yeah, for starters”

Shaw placed a hand on his chin and thoughtfully nodded.

Around that time, the land dragon, whose excitement had calmed down quite a bit, turned its attention to its surroundings.

It looked around at the demon lords with a lot of interest and seemed to be memorising their faces.

“Well it’s fine so far but the problem is what to do from now on. This land dragon—”

Shaw suddenly stopped talking and tilted his head.

“—Now that I think about it, does it have a name? If we keep calling it land dragon all the time then if we ever, and I want to believe that it will never happen, but if we ever run into another land dragon then it would just be inconvenient to refer to them”

It was a simple doubt.

Merea immediately answered Shaw’s question.

“■ ■ ■”

Starting with Shaw, the other demon lords couldn’t understand that either.

“What?”

“That’s his name”

“Ahh...”

Shaw clapped his hands with a sudden understanding of the situation.

“It’s a dragon after all, the name would of course, also be in dragon tongue. —In that case, please go ahead and translate it well into human tongue”

“Human tongue? Hnmm, uhhhh...”

At Shaw’s sudden demand, Merea had a surprised look before he started groaning while looking troubled.

After a while,

“No... E-u... ■■... No that’s a little off... uhmm...”

Merea’s expression, while he was trying to translate dragon tongue to human tongue showed how hard he was thinking but when seen by the demon lords who didn’t know the difficulty of the matter, it looked rather humorous.

However, when compared to the Merea who had been bloodthirst seeping out of him when he was on his horse, this Merea who was worried about such normal things seemed like quite the nice change.

While the demon lords were busy looking at Merea, he himself floated an expression like he had finally understood something.

“...<Noel>. —Yeah, this is probably the closest!”

It was a truly happy expression.

An expression that a child might have after solving a difficult problem.

“Hou, Noel. In that case, that is what we will call him from now on”

Shaw said, while looking around at the other demon lords for confirmation and he took a glance at the land dragon, at Noel.

Noel watched that exchange between Shaw and Merea and would occasionally raise a “Gya?” while tilting its head in an inquisitive manner.

At that time, the demon lords who still seemed to be rather cautious of Noel, seemed to have finally let their guards down.

The main reason was probably that they couldn’t feel any hostility from Noel.

In the end, they got close enough to pat Noel all over and finally they all got together to discuss their departure from that place.



“—At this time, it might be good if we went towards the end in one go”

Shaw was the one who started the meeting with those words.

The demon lords concentrated all their attention towards him.

Shaw continued to speak with a kind of tone that really left an impression and made sure to use a lot of hand and body gestures.

“It would probably be really hard to travel while not standing out when we’re with a land dragon. Even if we tell him not to follow us, he would—Noel would definitely follow along. —He seems to feel a strong sense of debt towards Merea”

Shaw guided everyone’s gaze to Noel who was lying down quietly next to Merea.

After having asked his name, they had roughly asked him about his circumstances and it seemed that he felt a strong sense of debt towards Merea who had saved him from the fatal draconic disease.

If it had its life saved, it would do at least enough to repay that. The demon lords held the conviction that the land dragon had a strong sense of duty.

It was also the moment that they realised the stubbornness of the land dragon./

“Even if his savior, Merea, were to tell him to go back home, it really does not seem like he would nod.

—Well, he’s completely separated from his group so he doesn’t have any place to return back to”

When he said that, the demon lords felt a certain affinity with it.

Since they held that sense of affinity with it, even if they wanted to abandon it, they wouldn’t be able to.

Although Noel wasn’t a demon lord but his circumstances were somewhat similar to them.

So in the end, the demon lords decided to take Noel along with them.

“And so, there is a change of policies”

As he said that, Shaw switched over to the main topic.

“It should take roughly three days to reach Lemuse’s territory from here. When you think about it, it’s a short time, though it does feel far when you think about the fact that we need to go through night three more times.

However, I feel that it is quite close when you look at the current situation”

They did quite well to be able to reach where they were after running away from Lindholm Sacred Mountain.

Everyone had that common thought.

“From the fact that Mūzeg’s shadow still hasn’t reached this point could be because their search may not have reached all the way here yet. It could be that they were spreading their search towards the Three Kingdoms to impede our escape to those countries”

“Which means that the idea to go all the way around was a success huh?”

Salman asked with a meek expression.

“I can’t say that with conviction yet. Though, if we think about it that way, it is, in a way, a chance. We don’t know when Mūzeg would spread their search wider so one way to handle it would be to travel as fast as possible.

Even though a coincidence, we managed to get a land dragon to help out”

The demon lords looked over at Noel.

While the humans were having their talk, Noel seemed to be rather bored and started yawning but the moment he noticed that everyone’s gaze was on him, he tilted his neck with a “Gya?”.

“If it’s Noel then he should be able to carry the leftover baggages quite easily. If he does that then the other horses would lighten up quite a bit”

Noel’s power was something that a horse could never compete with.

Although it wasn't at the level of a full grown dragon, as is usually seen in books but, it still had a body that could easily carry multiple people and many pieces of luggage.

Though it would be impossible to have 22 people on its back but, as far as luggage is concerned, they could easily place it on its back or maybe hang it from its chest. There were many ways they could handle it.

"Which is why, from here on, it will be an emphasis on speed. Let's make the horse's load lighter and get through quickly"

Until Shaw voiced this opinion, he had experienced a lot of hesitation.

There was no guarantee that this wasn't a trap from Mūzeg's side.

In order to drive the demon lords into the open, they might have purposefully lightened the search.

It could be the preparation to hunt the game that was numb from running and shows itself.

However, if they were too careful and let the chance go then the days would just pile up.

They finally managed to get past the first town and they concentrated on speed while in Neuce Gauss so, it would be pointless if they were careful more than necessary.

In the end, it is one of the two.

It'll either be hit or a miss.

The possibilities are two uncertain choices.

The more they thought about it, the deeper they would find themselves in trouble, even then Shaw thought about it.

Then what he came up with. —His conclusion.

"Three more days. —Let's pray that we get through it"

Shaw proposed that plan.

The demon lords took that suggestion and for a short while, thought about it by themselves.

It would be rather rude to Shaw, who mulled over this for a while, if they just replied without thinking twice about it.

They were all equal.

Which was why, they were clear that they couldn't rely too much on just one person.

The fact that they had already relied a lot on Merea was weighing down on them.

“—Alright then, I agree with your opinion”

After a short while, Salman spoke up. He was the first supporter.

“Ah, I'm fine with that plan as well. In fact, I think that it's a good idea”

Elma spoke up next, with a serious expression.

“I don't really have a god to pray to but, I'll agree with your opinion this time. We do need to have some amount of resolution. —It's the kind of situation where I really don't want to end up regretting not having that resolution after all”

Lilium smiled with her eyebrows drooping and she shrugged.

After that, the approvals came in steadily and in the end Merea was the only one left over.

The gazes of all the demon lords concentrated on Merea.

“Uhh, is it fine if they weren't words as a [King] ?”

Merea bitterly smiled as he faced all those gazes.

Merea had, of course, thought about this matter as an individual and come up with an opinion but if he thought about the situation up until that point then, he would have to come up with an [opinion as a leader] as well.

Although he couldn't deny the fact that he had ended up in that position just because of the flow of the situation but it is also true that he, himself, had taken it up.

Which was why, he couldn't very well go with a non-interference policy.

At Merea's question, the other demon lords strongly nodded.

“—Got it. Then let me say it frankly”

With that as the precursor, Merea stood up and spoke.



“—Let's go. Just three more days. Let's go with one last spurt of effort shall we?”



On his face, he had a smile that seemed to want to cheer everyone up.

Chapter 42

The Summit of Three Kings and The Intruder

That day, in one among the <Three Kingdoms> , located to the south of Lemuse--<Kingdom of Zuria> , there was a gathering of three young kings who were widely known as the “The Three Kings”.

There is no need to point it out but they were, in fact, the kings of the three kingdoms.

King of Kushana <Muran>.

King of Filarfia <Fasalis>.

Also, Queen of Zuria <Crisca>.

Those three people, who had once seen the same scenery at the Aios Academy, were now sitting in one of the rooms of the Royal Palace of Zuria in their respective solemn clothing.

It was a hall.

The ceiling was hemispherical and the surface of that wall had a magnificent angel drawn on it.

There were nude statues around as well, the entire room caused an artistic emotion to bubble up in the person looking at it, it also had a strange sense of pride in it.

“The ceiling is gaudy as ever huh. I feel like my eyes would get irritated if I keep looking at it”

A man with delicate features, with a lean body and his hair tied up in a knot looked up at the ceiling and spoke with a forced wry smile.

--It was Muran.

“Shut up. If you have a problem, go say that to the idiot who painted this. It seems like he wanted to seduce me by painting this but I really don’t understand what’s so good about this painting. It’s to a point where I seriously want to tell him to go find out what

I like before trying to seduce me..."

"Hahaha, paintings definitely don't suit Crisca"

"That, in itself, is really annoying, Muran"

"if you had just shown this famous person, who had drawn this painting, your gradebook from Aios Academy, he would have immediately given up. -- [This woman is unlikely to have feminine cultural emotions], right?"

"Your grades in art were pretty abysmal as well. Don't try to play innocent"

"Yes, yes"

Muran waved his hand and spoke up again in a different tone.

"Anyway, getting the conversation back on topic..., are you guys of the opinion that we should bow down to Mūzeg?"

The other voice that was having a conversation with Muran, it had a determined tone of voice that contained slight thorns.

It was the voice of a woman.

"Even though I finally managed to talk to the King of Mūzeg going as far as using flattery"

Queen of Zuria <Crisca>.

She was the master of the royal palace of Zuria where the three kings have gathered.

"I heard you were decked up for a change? I wonder how many men fell for you in just the time of you taking three steps. Though, you dressing yourself up, in a sense, is basically like a weapon..."

"—Even though you say that, you guys don't even seem to be bothered"

"Regrettably I already have two pretty flowers that I'm interested in and Fasalis already has a fiancée as well.

Not to mention, by now we are all extremely close to each other. I really can't see you as an object of romance"

“I’m not sure if I should be happy or not. —Well, I guess I should be happy that I haven’t been caught up with a womanizer like you”

She was wearing plain clothes at this moment.

The body parts that she was born with, seemed to have a lot of dark blue colours.

Dark blue long hair and similarly dark blue pupils.

Her skin was a clear white but, the clothes that covered that skin were, once again, dark blue.

If everything was dark blue then it would, invariably, bring out a plain look but in Crisca’s case, her beauty managed to negate that plainness completely.

—She was a ravishingly beautiful woman.

In fact, in Crisca’s case, it felt like she was purposefully wearing plain clothes so that she could keep her own luxuriousness that would come out naturally in check.

“So, what is it? Answer my question”

Crisca looked over at Muran with her dark blue eyes.

There was a sharp will in it.

“Hmm... , well, if it was possible then even I would like to yell, [Down with Mūzeg!] as well you know”

“Then why did you suggest [surrender] as one of the options?”

When Crisca said that, Muran brought his legs, that had been on the table till then, down and answered with a rather serious expression.

“In reality, it’s going to get rather hard from now on. Even I’m not saying this just to mess with you. It’s fine to clash with Mūzeg but using the lives of the citizens and over and above that only managing something like a draw, that kind of result would be horrendous, was what I implicitly meant. —Though I ended up saying it out loud now”

“What’s with that, it’s not like you Muran. The number one sword dancer of the Kingdom of Kushana, are you scared now with a war in front of you?”

“You’re quite harsh as always huh”

Muran laughed foolishly for a moment but then he immediately retracted it.

“Oh just let me be, Crisca. I’m not a combatant or an acrobat anymore. Even like this, I’m still a [King]. If I start counting the number of lives on my shoulders then even I would want to come up with a rational argument”

After saying that, Muran went back to his easygoing air and once again kept his feet back on the table.

His face had a slight wry smile but the look in his eyes were still sharp.

Crisca who was facing him, drew back a little after hearing his reply and then heaved a sigh and asked Fasalis who was sitting next to him.

“Even you, Fasalis? What is that huge body for?”

“It’s for protecting the people”

“...Haa. So it ends up like this huh”

Crisca heaved another sigh and her shoulders drooped.
Her dark blue bangs hung over as if to hide her face.

“...Even with the alliance of three kings, I don’t know if we could go against them. Having brought us to such a state, we have been strategically defeated by them huh”

“That would be the case”

At Crisca’s words, Muran waved his hands and spoke up.

“Actually, did you have any harvest Crisca? Did you have a battle of sarcasm with the King of Mūzeg?”

“—Nope, though I did plan on doing that, the King of Mūzeg managed to avoid to completely.

He implicitly recommended, [become my follower] and that was the end”

“Were his words really that gentle?”

“...[You people are next]”

“Perfect perfect, I’m really happy that he spoke exactly as I had expected him to.
—God damn it”

Muran cursed in the end and threw his hand in the air as if he were giving up.

At that point, Fasalis, with his huge figure, who had been sitting with an upright posture watching the conversation between the two, opened his mouth.

“If Muran’s <Magic Cannon> were to be completed and you managed to get enough fuel for it, then what do you think our chances of success would be? —This would be the final divide. Even though it’s a prediction, it would be better to come up with accurate numbers right?

Since this might in fact... be the end”

Fasalis clasped his hands on the the round table, both his hands formed a fist.

Muran immediately answered Fasalis’ question.

“My prediction is about 40”

“Out of 50?”

Crisca asked while she stayed with her shoulders slumped.

“Out of 100, 40%”

“Ha? You’ve spent that much money building something as grand as a magic cannon and it only ends up with 40%?”

“Oh shut up Crisca. The other side has <Serius> after all. He even has the <Demonic Spear Kurtad> of the <Seven Imperials> that could interfere with physical phenomenon with a single, not to mention the mountain load of other techniques he

has that could blow a mountain away.

The <Seven Imperials> especially are extremely potent against practitioners which in turn makes them potent against the magic cannons. If this had been an era where science took precedence then I would be the conqueror of this age though”

“If we look at the fact that, that is actually not the case then this could be called the biggest mistake of the age”

“...It's just as you say”

At Crisca's sarcasm, Muran very fixedly retorted.
He himself already knew that to be true.

“In any case, the trends of battles in the past may have perfused in this way”

Fasalis spoke up in between.

“However, I think that the <Seven Imperials> are an exception. Well, exceptions are everywhere in history but, in the current age where the principle for the effect is not clearly understood, the seven imperials are special. —Anyone would want them. Since you can essentially do against techniques what that <Technique God> of old did, without needing to be a complete monster to accomplish”

“In that case, let me ask you, why did you say 40%?”

Crisca spoke up as if to being the conversation back on track.

“You asked that too quickly, seriously, what an impatient princess”, said Muran but he immediately answered her.

“It's because we could make it through as long as Serius isn't there. I'm certain that we can pierce through the defense barrier of the practitioners corps of Müzeg. I've bet my money on that and have at least that much pride in it.

Over and above everything else, this was created by concentrating the technique industry developed by Kushana. Which is why, as long as we can keep Serius away, I could create a hole”

“If you create a hole then Zuria's Azure Spearmen and Filarfia's Steel Cavalry could go in for the kill huh”

“I’ll be leaving the frontlines to the two of you over there. I, personally, don’t want to be out on the frontlines anymore. I’ll continue to fire the magic cannon from the back. —Well, this is all a talk for if everything [goes well]”

Muran was, as expected, quite pessimistic about that plan.

Crisca slumped her shoulders once again but this time, she had a slightly worried look in her eyes as she asked Muran.

“Are you really that scared of Serius?”

“Yeah, I’m a man who’s honest with his feelings so I’ll say it out loud, I’m scared. The feeling that I can’t compete with that Serius is something that I feel somewhere deep in my heart”

“Well, you two had consecutive complete defeats against that [Brad] after all”

At Crisca’s words, both Muran and Fasalis had a bad reaction.

“However, if we take him by surprise, even Serius would have some openings wouldn’t he?”

“That’s what you would think huh. Even I thought that. Everytime I had a match with Serius I would think that, even now I thought that. However—”

“You haven’t managed to take him by surprise even once, is it?”

The one who added on to the end was Fasalis.

With a low growl like that of a beast coming out of his huge body, he nodded with a gesture like he was thinking deeply.

As if to reply to Fasalis’ words, Muran continued speaking.

“ [Brad] is smart, he has an eye for tactics, an eye for strategy and he responds easily to standard moves. —That is something that anyone knows. If it’s people who have seen the on board games or strategy games between Serius and I would know at least this much. However, that is not what I mean.

It's something you notice when you first compare hands with him. He is—”

“His [intuition] is insanely sharp”

As if to succeed Muran's words, Fasalis spoke while groaning.
Muran nodded at his words.

“Yup, that. It's to the point where you even end up thinking that he is loved by god. For example, if there were three choices. I, myself, would end up hesitating till the last moment and finally make a choice. Serius on the other hand, would see through the choice I made in that last moment and in the next moment he would already have a strategy to respond to my choice.

—There's no doubt about it. I'm sure that he can see into people's minds and the future of the battlefield”

At some point, Muran had floated a serious expression and spoke.

“Those are some scary eyes he has. When you meet him, it feels like he can see to the very depths of your soul. Since I have sat in front of him many times, I'm seriously scared of those eyes”

“That's why, 40 huh. Even though you have that much confidence in your magic cannon and still 40 huh”

“It was a plan I had come up with to at least give one back to Mūzeg though. Even as I am, I was known as a child prodigy you know? —The broken husk of the former child prodigy who's scared out of his wits now though”

A probability of 40% was definitely too low to be going to war on.

If they lose their countries may die, with that kind of a risk, 40% was too low a chance to bet everything on.

Not to mention that the acquisition of the magic stones for the magic cannons wasn't really progressing well.

If they thought about it more realistically, then the numbers would probably only decrease.

Muran tilted his chair backwards and heaved a sigh at the ceiling.
As he was, he continued to speak in a dull tone, as if he was cursing at god.

“At that academy, the one person who managed to fling mud into Serius’ face was only [Kudo]. I have no idea where that blockhead was from but, if he was a noble from my land then even if my eyes become bloodshot I would search for him. And then, if I find him, I’m fine with bowing my head even a hundred times... Just this once, somehow come out onto the battlefield to fling mud onto Serius’ face, I’d beg”

Those were meant by Muran as a joke.

That joke, while slightly tilting the three kings towards bowing down to Mūzeg, was supposed to disappear.

It was supposed to disappear into the bosom of the angel on the ceiling, meant completely as an irony with a paradoxical brilliant thought hidden in it.

However there was one man who was ready to pull that joke to himself, even rather violently at that.



“Very well, shall we have you bow your head to me a hundred times? It’s one of the best ideas I could hope for, Muran”



The gazes of the three kings, for but a moment, went towards the entrance of the hall.

Until there was permission otherwise, no one was allowed to enter. That was the order that had been passed onto the imperial guards outside.

However, [that man] indifferently walked into the hall, with the hem of his clothes dragging on the floor.

Next to him was a woman wrapped in black clothes, as if he were a spy.

“Impossible—”

With his eyes wide, almost popping out of its sockets, Fasalis spoke as if the

representative of the three people.

And then,

“— [Kudo] ! Why are you here?!”

Crisca asked the one doubt that could solve all their questions to that man— to <Hasim Kudo Lemuse>.

Chapter 43

Hasim Kudo Lemuse

On that day, Hasim managed to sneak into the meeting hall in Zuria's castle without any issue at all.

The path they took till they reached that hall was filled with tension.

While being concealed by the members of Aisha's exclusive spy organization, Hasim managed to sneak into the Kingdom of Zuria.

That in itself wasn't really that difficult.

Even among the princes of Lemuse, Hasim's existence itself was not very widely known.

It doesn't even need to be mentioned that, that was simply the result of the King of Lemuse refusing to let Hasim have any limelight because of his own jealousy.

Although it couldn't be called a lucky break but in the current situation, that had actually worked in their favor.

However, in the recent days, he had been the topic of gossip amongst the citizens of Lemuse as the one who would save the kingdom so he did take the basic precaution of disguising himself.

The problematic part was what came after they snuck into the country.

In what way should they intrude into Zuria's castle where the Summit of Three Kings was taking place.

They definitely wouldn't be able to pass through the castle gates with their disguise as travellers.

If they had prepared their hand in advance then they might have been able to prepare the appropriate position in Zuria to make it through the gates but, from the time they found out about the Summit of Three Kings and made their way to the three kingdoms, they had already used up all the time they had left.

In the first place, they didn't have much time on their hands to begin with.

Since that is the case, then they have no other choice but to [invade] as fast as possible. Oddly, Hasim felt an odd sense of camaraderie with that word, so much so that he ended up quietly laughing to himself.

When he remembered the time when he invaded into the academy of the academic state of Aios. he realised that he had a past unlike what you would expect a prince to have. He remembered all of that with mixed feelings of self-torment and pride.

They were feelings similar to what a mischievous boy would feel after having successfully fooled adults.

On the contrary, the one in charge of escorting Hasim to the Summit of Three Kings, Aisha, had a rather sharp expression on her face.

There were a lot of guards on lookout in Zuria's castle. The job she had been entrusted involved in her having to successfully evade the guard's surveillance net and manage to get Hasim to the meeting without any mishaps.

Hasim was definitely not the type who moved without thinking but in that sense, Aisha was several steps ahead of him. Which is why, Hasim, to the best of his abilities, didn't interfere with her.

He instead decided just to watch over Aisha as she very seriously studied the floor plan of Zuria's castle, which he had no idea how she had gotten her hands on.

As a result he succeeded in trespassing into the hall where the Summit of Three Kings was taking place but the path to it was rather troublesome.

The measures that Aisha took, while they were rather plain and had a high success rate but they were also the kind of strategy that would be considered rather unsightly.

"Crisca, I told you this at Aios Academy as well but your defenses are too weak. The area under the floor is completely deserted. It's fine that you have more ambition than others but if you keep looking up then you'll have the rug pulled from under your feet"

"__"

While sweeping the hem of his clothes, Hasim spoke to Crisca.

On the other hand, Crisca, who even forgot to move the bangs covering her eyes, kept

staring into Hasim's eyes with a dazed look.

"Well, I managed to reach this place because of that though—Though let me tell you, there are tons of blind spots in the other passageways as well. The one who built this castle was probably the previous king so I don't want to nitpick but you could at least fill those blind spots in couldn't you?"

Hasim continued to admonish Crisca but she suddenly opened her mouth.

"...Ku, Kudo, you, did you seriously crawl your way under the floor...?"

"That's right... Seriously though, my clothes are completely filthy now. I've been trying to dust them for a while but they refuse to become clean"

Hasim continued to dust the hem of his clothes.

The hem of his clothes had multiple spots of dust on it and was clearly dirty. The woman in black clothes next to Hasim—Aisha, pulled out a handkerchief and wiped Hasim's face.

His face had traces of dust as well.

"In recent times, even robbers won't go that far you know..."

"I'm not a robber though"

"In that case—, what are you?"

At that point, another person butt into the conversation between the two. The one who butt into the conversation between Crisca and Hasim, with his huge bear like body was the [King of Filarfia] —Fasalis.

"Let's hear your name from you, yourself"

While speaking, Fasalis also took a step towards Hasim. He seemed to be on guard against Hasim.

Hasim on the other hand, just let that caution slide with an easygoing air.

" <Hasim Kudo Lemuse>. So that there is no misunderstanding I'll say it outright, I'm

the one who attended Aios Academy with you people. I'm not some fake okay?"

"...Yeah, we wouldn't doubt something like that now. —No, more like I'm convinced right now"

At Hasim's answer, Fasalis felt as if his strength had faded away.

Watching him speak that calmly, his figure seemed rather similar to his memories of [Kudo].

In that moment, Fasalis was, without a shadow of a doubt, sure that the man in front of him was [Kudo].

"...Seriously? You just said Lemuse didn't you?"

"Ah, that's right Muran. Even like this I'm still a prince of Lemuse"

Hasim laughed in a rather self-mocking way while answering Muran.

"—Haha... , seriously, Kudo. Are you really Kudo?"

"What else did you expect? Well, I agree that my appearance wasn't very cool though. By the way, I had the guards standing outside sleep a little. I'll apologize to them later. —If the guards were too intimidating it would, in turn, be more suspicious but, those numbers are too few.

You people are unnecessarily strong so instead you're rather negligent in that aspect"

"Oi, it's definitely Kudo. This irritating but accurate sermon is without a doubt from Kudo"

"That's the reason you realised that I am who I say I am?" said Hasim with a wry smile.

"—I missed you Kudo!"

Suddenly Muran jumped up from his seat and briskly walked towards Hasim and hugged him.

Hasim's expression didn't change from his wry smile.

"Oi, how old do you think we are? How many years has it been since that time. This would be rather bad to show in front of the public wouldn't it?"

“I don’t care! It’s a fateful reunion!”

Muran’s expression changed from the cynical smile he had until then and changed to a genuine smile from the bottom of his heart that was purely enjoying the current situation.

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“—What? The third prince? I heard that Lemuse only had two princes?”

After having enjoyed their reunion for a while, they realised that they didn’t have much time left and returned to the table and started sharing information.

When they heard the commotion inside, the guards rushed into the room but each king restrained their guards and they were left tilting their heads in confusion.

“Well, I have a bad relationship with my father”

“It’s a little odd saying this in front of you, who’s that father’s son but, the current king of Lemuse is horrendous. Can’t something be done about that?”

“Something can. I’m going to do something from now on”

Hasim was rather relieved at the fact that he had been accepted by them much more smoothly than he had thought would happen.

At the same time, as he had expected, the Three Kingdoms had also noticed the terrible state that Lemuse was currently in and that fact made Hasim feel a mixed sense of relief and lamentation.

Thanks to that consolidation of information was much easier but he still couldn’t help feeling embarrassed about the shortcomings of his own family.

“—Do you plan on killing him?”

Crisca asked him with a meek expression.

At those words, Muran and Fasalis looked like they finally thought of that but they immediately looked convinced.

“I don’t plan on narrating the details of the majority of my life but... well, that’s how it is. Having Lemuse crushed as it is, is something that I could never agree with. Which is why, I’ll become the king.

—I’ll kill him. After I die, I’ll probably end up in hell but, in the current situation, stuff about what might happen after I die really makes no difference. I’ll be living in the [present]”

Hasim’s determination could be seen, brilliantly shining in those aqua blue eyes of his, the Three Kings were able to clearly see that determination.

“...well, we can’t really reproach you when it comes to such dark things. Before becoming the king and even after becoming one, we have done some rather horrible things after all”

At Hasim’s determination, Muran gave a slight nod and then started talking about himself.

“—I won’t ask you to forgive us. However, it’s true that we ended up causing the death of a hero”

Hasim immediately understood what Muran was talking about.

He was referring to the deed that the Three Kingdoms had their hand in, in the past they had done something that was rather [similar] to demon lord hunting.

“There’s no way back from that situation. Not to mention, no matter how the situation changes, I don’t think I would have chosen a different route. That was how cornered we were. That’s why, as the King of Kushana, I don’t plan on apologizing for anything other than that hero.

He, who was called a demon lord by someone, was without a doubt a [Hero] in my eyes”

Becoming a demon lord from a hero.

That sort of a situation was quite widespread during the turn of the era.

However, as far as Muran was concerned, the man he had let die in the past had gone from being a demon lord to a hero.

A reversible change.

In the end, it was a label that could be changed as and when it was convenient.

While people may think that they won't be judged just because of some words but the term hero, no matter the era, is considered in a good light.

Which was why Muran decided to call that man a hero.

As the hero who saved them all.

“The mood turned rather gloomy huh. ——So, why did you come here now, [Hasim] ?”

That was a question from Muran as the King of Kushana.

He didn't call him [Kudo] as he would an old friend who studied together with him but instead [Hasim] who is a prince of Lemuse.

Hasim as well noticed what Muran was trying to say and straightened his posture.

From that point forward, it would be diplomacy.

“In order to save Lemuse and in order to scare the hell out of Mūzeg, I want you to lend me your power. Of course, I have something to offer from my side as well”

In Hasim's eyes, a burning light could be seen.



“Something to offer, huh? Does Lemuse even have something like that? ——Ah, if I hurt your feelings then I apologize. However, this is diplomacy. We have the lives of our citizens on the line. So I hope you'll forgive a certain amount of strict speech”, said Fasalis.

With a large yet dignified figure, he sat upright in his chair with a posture that looked like not even a gale could move him.

“No, I get what Fasalis is trying to say. If you’re a king then that much is to be expected”

“Then I’ll ask, what can you get from the current Lemuse that would be equivalent to our assistance?”

Hasim nodded to Fasalis’ words.

With a serious expression, he raised one hand in front of him and raised his index finger.

“First”

With that as the precursor, Hasim started to speak.

“Under Lemuse, there is a vein”

“—Hou, a vein”

The one who calmly spoke up to that was Muran.

He had an easy-going air around him but his eyes showed a sharp glint.

“That’s right. Not to mention, it’s a vein of magic stones”

“...Seriously?”

Muran spoke up once more.

This time however, he had none of his easy-going air and looked rather astonished.

“Seriously”

Matching with Muran’s casual speech, Hasim replied with a plain answer as well.

“Is it different from the one that the current king offered to help us consider a non-aggression treaty?”

“Ah, that one is something that we showed off to father in order to keep him away from the actual magic stone vein. I had already found the vein long before my father thought of it and I’ve so far managed to keep it away from him, which was rather hard though. He’s unnecessarily sensitive when it comes to money after all. —Just shows all the experience he has in receiving bribes every day.

Anyway, this is a vein that I have concealed for quite a while now. Even though I knew that there was a vein there, I purposefully decided not to dig it up”

“The reason for that was?”

Fasalis took the lead and questioned him.

“Just what I had said earlier. If I were to dig it up, it would smell of money. There may be others, other than father, who would be pulled in by that smell”

“...Mūzeg huh?”

“Who knows. The current Mūzeg could take over one or two veins from other countries quite easily. Especially, in the north of Mūzeg, where it’s hard for us to reach, I’ve heard that there are quite a few veins of precious resources”

“Mūzeg’s speed is quite frightening. As expected of the king who managed to set up such a humongous country. He’s really fast and knows where to concentrate his resources”

“This isn’t the first time that Mūzeg’s king showed that he was blessed in political tactics”

There were groans in response to that.

It basically showed that they were in agreement when it came to their opinions of Mūzeg.

At that point, Crisca, who had been quietly listening till then, floated a grimace while joining in on the conversation.

In a rather sensational fashion, she tucked her long blue hair behind her ear and opened her slender lips.

“However, thanks to that we, to the south, somehow managed to survive. Because of the Alliance of Three Kings and — Mūzeg’s whim”

“I don’t think it’s something like a whim which relies on luck. Simply because Mūzeg’s king made a rational decision, the three kingdoms together managed to survive this long. Add the fact that the Alliance of Three Kings managed to steadily accumulate

your strength, I think in this situation you guys have done a really good job”

At Crisca’s bitter words, Hasim straightforwardly praised them.

After that, he returned the conversation back to the original topic.

“—And, so. I’ve managed to dig up some of the magic stones from that mine. Those magic stones... I’ll give them to you”

“What do you mean give? Even if we are handed magic stones, if we don’t have a way to use them then it’s rather pointless don’t you think? Not to mention that having the stones could lead to the enemy setting its sights on us as well”

Like an actor, Muran spoke so with a lot of hand and body gestures while laughing.

“The Kingdom of Kushana has built a new strategic weapon haven’t they?”

“—so you found out huh”

That acting was immediately found out by Hasim.

Muran stuck his tongue out very deliberately and floated a smile.

“I’d just heard [rumours] that Kushana really lived up to its title of the foremost in industry”

“At least hide the fact that you sent in spies, oi!”

“It seems that you didn’t notice so, I’m just teaching you a good lesson”

At Muran’s reproach, Hasim laughed scornfully in a very forced manner

It was an exchange between close friends and it definitely did not devolve into a stern atmosphere.

“Even we managed to catch a few spies you know”

“Our Aisha is really skilled. I’ll be very troubled if you lump her in with your run-of-the-mill spies”

“I get that. Just the fact that you sneaked into this room alone goes to show that.

—Well whatever. So, what is the scale of that magic ore vein?”

“Compared to the exhausted magic ore vein of the Kingdom of Kushana, it’s definitely much bigger”

“Haa... you even know that far huh... Fine, it’s enough”

Muran laughed with an intermingled wry smile while waving his hand.

“If Lemuse is going to provide us with enough magic stones then I’m fine with the alliance. Though, at the end of the day, it’s still only me who is fine with it”

“Just handing over magic stones is enough to set up an alliance with you huh”

“The development of our industry has been the long cherished wish of Kushana after all”

At the sarcastic words of Crisca, Muran bowed gracefully and spoke in an elegant tone.

“Alright, with this I have Moran’s agreement huh. ——What about you other two, Fasalis and Crisca?”

At Hasim’s words, both of them fell silent at the same time.

It vividly portrayed that they had yet to make up their minds on the matter.

“With just that much, agreeing is a little difficult. At least for my kingdom, Zuria”

“Let’s hear your reason”

The first one to speak up was the queen of Zuria, Crisca.

“The other side still has Serius Brad Müzeg, not to mention many other exceptional individuals. Even if we managed to create a satisfactory number of magic cannons, even then we can’t be said to be equal. We need more power.

——Can Lemuse offer such power?”

Crisca’s demand was very straightforward.

Hasim, as well, had expected that demand of hers.

Which is why he was able to answer smoothly.

—Lies, that is.

“—We can”

“Are you seriously saying that?”

“Yeah. Lemuse has power”

“It’s really hard to believe that something like that exists”

Compared to Crisca, who could not even conceal her expression that clearly said that she didn’t believe him, Hasim on the other hand put on an air of importance and very slowly and clearly spoke up.



“Let me rent out the power of over 20 [Demon Lords] to you”



After that it was Hasim’s match.

A once in a lifetime match that had lives on the line.

Chapter 44

Surely you're crazy

“Demon lords...? Did you just say demon lords?”

“That's right”

“—fufu”

Crisca floated a smile.

A strange smile on that beautiful appearance of hers.

Even like that, her eyes had a hint of aggressiveness in them, to the point where the term, a rose with thorns fit her very well.

“Not to mention 20 of them”

“Without a doubt”

“—Where?”

“—In my grasp”

“...”

Crisca's eyes that seemed to have a strange light in them stared directly into Hasim's eyes.

As if she were trying to find the smallest hint of hesitation in the depths of his eyes, those were the kind of eyes she had.

Not once did Hasim look away from Crisca's eyes.

He looked directly back into Crisca's eyes with his aqua blue eyes.

If you looked at it another way, it might seem like a romantic atmosphere between two lovers looking deep into each others eyes but, in reality, the air between the two was

considerably more deadly and felt like they were staring daggers into each other.

Especially for Hasim, it felt like Crisca's gaze could directly lead him to death.

If they couldn't form an alliance here then Lemuse would definitely collapse.

As far as Hasim was concerned, that was the same as Hasim himself dying.

“—What proof do you have?”

“I want to show it to you but, I can't do that right now”

“Now then, what do you mean by that?”

“I've already sent them over to attack Mūzeg”

“You're rather quick huh, Hasim. Such arrangements even before you form an alliance? Normally, after the alliance is formed, the four of us would sit down together and then decide on where to send the demon lords right?”

“—Ha”

At Crisca's overbearing words, Hasim snorted scornfully

Muran and Fasalis, who were sitting next to her noticed that Crisca was a little annoyed.

“There's no need”

“What do you mean?”

“—There's no need for that Crisca. Have any of you ever won, even once, against that [Brad]?”

“.....!”

It was like a provocation from Hasim. No, by now it was a clear provocation.

Crisca who had spouted combatant words till then, suddenly felt a sense of defeat.

While she was looking for an opening to thrust her suspicions in, the other side ended up attacking in an unexpected manner.

Thinking of herself as the [attacking side], at the unexpected counter she couldn't help but draw back a little.

And with the next words she was at a loss.

Hasim did not let that opening go.

Before Crisca could speak any further, he started to rapidly question her.

"Would the strategy of people who couldn't win even once against that Brad be of any use?"

Hasim spread both his arms and tried to make himself look much bigger while he spoke to Crisca.

"—No. It's not, Crisca"

The way he spoke was the very incarnation of disrespect.

The incarnation of arrogance.

However, since it was all true, Crisca couldn't blame Hasim at all.

While Hasim's aggressiveness could be seen as absurd but it was based on a firm truth.

Brad.

In other words, the only one who had ever taken the upper hand in strategy against that Serius Brad Mūzeg was the man in front of them, Hasim.

That fact was heavy on Crisca's lips.

Even if she tried to say something, that weight would act like a lid on her lips.

"If we cooperate a good idea would come up? —That's wrong, strategy is not something like that.

Coming up with ideas is definitely a useful. Having a wide range is a wonderful thing. — [However], only when the [ideas have some possibility] does that situation arise. If we start with impossible ideas from the beginning and incorporate them into our strategy, then that would be a sure shot road to a colossal failure. We would be converting a success into a failure"

“Y, you’re just saying whatever you want...! Now that you mention it, sarcasm and a harsh tongue were always something you prided yourself in wasn’t it!”

Even Crisca couldn’t continue to listen to Hasim’s rude speech anymore and unintentionally words of abuse rose up.

Along with her good looks, she had a look of pure anger, the first thing that anger did was remove the weight on her lips.

Hasim on the other hand did not change his expression much. That smile filled with cynicism remained the same.

“...”

However, Hasim did not say anything.

〔Try saying something〕 was what could be felt from Crisca’s expression while she waited for his words.

Crisca had a strange feeling like she had been hurried on one hand but on the other hand she felt like she had been gone easy on.

Over and above everything else, the feeling that he had the initiative in the conversation caused her to feel a sense of irritation welling up.

“...Damn it! This is the first time I’ve been so angry at myself for not being able to answer!”

However, in the end, Crisca could only abuse Hasim for his harsh words but couldn’t actually deny the contents of what he had said.

She then turned a venomous gaze at Hasim and asked him,

“...Do you really have a plan? If we use the power of those demon lords, can we really rival Mūzeg and that Serius?”

Since she couldn’t reply to Hasim’s earlier words, she had no choice but to join in on the premise.

“It’s possible”, replied Hasim.

It was an immediate answer.

Hasim did not miss that Crisca seemed to be tilting towards giving her approval for the alliance.

So that he did not miss that opportunity, he once again spoke in a firm tone.

“Which is why I moved quickly. —Well, it’s not like I’m denying all of your strategies. However, I did not have much time left to put [my strategy] into effect. That was why, even though I felt bad about it, I still went ahead and prioritized that plan”

This time Hasim [pulled back].

Since he didn’t have time, he prioritized his own plan. That being the logic behind his actions, he based it on the [truth] earlier.

Be that as it may, even while pulling back, Hasim still pushed through on the points that he felt he had to.

“—Is that so”

That being the case, Crisca found herself between a rock and a hard place.

As an alliance partner, Hasim had set up Crisca quite well. He even managed to fill up that opening she had to push her doubt in and made it impossible for her to speak any further on that topic.

He had buried that opening with a rather strong [truth from experience].

If looked at calmly, it was clear that, that negotiation had an air of a battle. Crisca, as one of the three kings, was smart enough to see that.

However,

By the time she noticed it, it had already finished.

With just a moment’s opening, she, who had her hands full in trying to dodge the provocation filled attack instead had her armour attacked.

Having finally dodged that attack, she thought “This time I definitely shall” but in front of her eyes were a firm and rather suspicious logic filled heavy armour infantry.

Even so, it didn’t seem like her sword could penetrate that armour.

Then, with the other side just crossing over the line known as alliance the match would be over.

—I've been done in quite cleverly.

Words, expressions, tone of voice, gestures, it felt like she was manipulated quite well with various things.

In the end, the feeling welling up in Crisca's heart was such a sense of defeat.

In the first place, this wasn't a situation of winning or losing. If the situation was looked at as a whole then the basis for the match had been a feeling of friendship but even then, a [I lost] kind of feeling seemed to permeate through Crisca.

However, just because she was frustrated she couldn't stay quiet forever. She determined herself and opened her mouth.

“—Understood... Definitely right? You'll definitely be able to scare the hell out of Mūzeg right?”

“Yeah, of course. It won't just end in scaring Mūzeg either. Using this as an opportunity, we'll build up a powerful force in the eastern part of the continent that can stand against Mūzeg. If we let their tyranny go any longer then the continent won't last very long and would definitely collapse. In order to save the various countries, we need the current victory”

Gracefully and relaxedly but still powerfully.

With the perfect tone of voice, Hasim spoke.

At that moment, Crisca once again confirmed that the match had been decided.

“...Understood. Zuria shall also agree to Lemuse's entry into the alliance”

While being slightly dejected, Crisca spoke to Hasim.

The earlier rose with thorns kind of expression disappeared and a pouting girl's expression showed itself on her face.

Seeing that, Hasim floated a carefree smile and laughed loudly.

“Haha, seriously Crisca. Are you still upset at losing in an argument with me? As usual, your looks are that of a beautiful woman but the insides are still quite childish huh?”

“Sh, shut up! Even like this I’m working really hard! My vassals keep saying annoying things like 『Be more solemn』 or 『You must not get angry like a spoilt child like that』! That’s why I’ve been working really hard!”

“Ah, ah, got it got it”

“Y, you! You’re not even seriously listening to me are you?! You’re always like that! Even at that time——”

“Got it, so I’ll listen to you later okay? Later”

Handling Crisca who was yelling loudly, Hasim looked at the last man who was left.

At that large firm frame, the king of Filarfia, Fasalis.



“The one left over is you huh, Fasalis”

“...ahh”

At Hasim’s words and gaze, Fasalis replied with a sound which was very reminiscent of an animal’s growl.

“Looking at how you are, it seems like it’ll be impossible to make you agree like with Muran and Crisca huh”

“I’m mostly inclined to an approval. However, compared to those two, I’m more on the careful side after all”

“It’s possible that your presence is what has kept the Alliance of Three Kings going so far. These two are excellent but have a rather unrestrained nature”

“You’re mostly like that too, Kudo. ——No, Hasim”

With an unrestrained relaxed look, Fasalis looked straight at Hasim. Even though he had his arms relaxedly placed on the table, you could feel a wall stronger than around Crisca.

“The thing I’m worried about is what comes after victory”

“What comes after victory?”

“That’s right”

Fasalis waited for the right moment and then started speaking.

“Victory. Yeah, with enough magic cannons and your tactics, we have enough to win against Mūzeg. However, [everything is over after victory] is not how this would end”

“What do you mean?”

At Hasim’s question, Fasalis nodded once before he answered.

“...First, Mūzeg is not small enough to collapse after a single war”

“Probably”

“No matter whether we have the magic cannons or not, if we consider the difference between our military strength then finishing Mūzeg off in one go is impossible. Of course, winning against them in a war would give us the advantage when it comes to political maneuvers but it would also give them the opportunity to fight back. In the end we all need to survive”

“Yeah”

“The problems starts after that, Hasim. Assuming we do win against them closely. The other side wins out in ability. I’m not talking about the ability of strategy or tactics here.

I’m talking about their ability as [an entire nation]. In other words, [the ability to bounce back from the war] is something that the other side is overwhelmingly above us in. That’s how many people Mūzeg has”

“That’s... right”

Even Hasim understood that well.

The territory of the state, resources and not to mention human resources is something that Mūzeg had an extremely large quantity of.

It was to the point where it wasn't even clear if Lemuse and the three kingdoms banded together, they would even be equal to Mūzeg.

With the current progress, Mūzeg had spread its territory to the north and west.

"When we win with a small margin, however, we'll end up with injuries too. Since we're discussing winning, so if we look at it as a whole, we would have the small wounds but tell me, who do you think would bounce back faster from their wounds?"

"..."

"If we look at it as a whole, it would most likely be Mūzeg. We might be very intimate but at the end of the day, we are still independent nations. Over and above anything, as kings we would want to prioritize our own countries"

Muran would prioritize the kingdom of Kushana.

Crisca would prioritize the kingdom of Zuria.

Fasalis would prioritize the kingdom of Filarfia.

And Hasim would prioritize the kingdom of Lemuse.

They would first think of it.

They have no choice but to think of it first.

That is their duty as a ruler.

"Which is why, when that time comes, I'll prioritize my country above everything else so that it can be returned to its former self. However, we can't catch up to Mūzeg who have a higher ability. So, in that situation, we who are adjacent to Mūzeg would be the ones who first get [revenge] taken on.

If we were to have revenge taken on us without the wounds of battle healing, I don't expect us to survive much after that"

"What are you trying to say?"

At Hasim's straightforward question, Fasalis answered immediately.

His large mouth spun words with a tone of voice tinged with coercion.

“—I want a [guarantee]. Lemuse is in the depths so it can use the three countries as a wall”

“Yeah, that’s true”

Hasim did not deny that fact. If the geography was looked at, it was rather obvious after all.

“Hasim, I want to guarantee concentrated help from your country, for my country’s sake”

“...I, see”

Hasim heard Fasalis’ words and floated a small smile.

It wasn’t a smile for anything funny but, instead it was a warlike smile which came as a precursor to him trembling with excitement.

Most likely, amongst the three kings, Fasalis was the one who was most proficient in negotiations.

Muran managed to attain profit for his country by securing a source of magic stones.

Crisca considers the entire three countries as her home and got a commitment from Hasim.

However, that wasn’t something limited to Zuria alone.

If the perspective was changed, it could be said that Crisca was the only one who gained nothing from this and in fact, made a loss. —Simply because she didn’t manage to secure any particular profits for her own country.

In the same light, Fasalis was the definitely the most excellent.
Hasim was sure of that internally.

Fasalis was trying to protect his country as his first priority, in other words, he was trying to get the [reconstruction priority] from Hasim.

In the end, the three countries are part of an alliance.
They definitely aren’t [one nation].
Whether their decision was the right one as a king or not was probably in that one

point.

That was why Hasim smiled.

He was glad to find out that, inside one of the people who he would soon work with, was a king who he could approve.

Of course, Hasim had his own preparations.

“All right, Fasalis. ——I shall [give it to you]”

What though?

“The current Lemuse, as well as—the [future Lemuse]”

On that day, in front of the three kings, a <Mad King> was about to be born.

The man who would have future historians give an extremely divided opinion on, on that day said the first words that would contribute to those opinions.

Although future historians were divided on their opinions of his words but there was one point that all the historians seemed to be in agreement of.

[In any event, he was crazy in more ways than one]



“The future Lemuse?”

At Hasim’s words, Fasalis unintentionally tilted his neck in confusion.

“That’s right, the future Lemuse as well”

“Let’s hear the details”

“It’s not really that complicated a talk”

Hasim said, rather calmly.

“If we’re only able to attain an [unsatisfactory victory] against Mūzeg then I’ll give you the entirety of Lemuse. —— [The entirety] of it. The current Lemuse as well as—”



“The Lemuse that would be born from here on out, including all the people in it”



“...Impossible”

Fasalis realised the meaning of Hasim’s words faster than anyone else.

At the same time, he saw a terrifying shadow on Hasim.

“Everything, Fasalis. The current Lemuse has put all of its hopes onto me. It’s probably the result of me quietly doing all the administrative tasks without my father finding out. If I stood out too much then Mūzeg would end up finding out after all. So I’ve been holding back lately but, even then as far as the citizen’s of Lemuse are concerned, I’m a source of hope for them.

Most probably, if I didn’t come here, the rumors would have reached you somehow or another. That’s how much the citizen’s consider me to be their light of hope”

Hasim’s speech was like one of the villainous demon lords of old.

Placing oneself in a high position and rule the others, being the personification of a mighty unique power.

Like the embodiment of arrogance, he talks in a way that absolutely justifies himself.

Even though he had absolutely no basis for his talks but even then the very fact that he was like a manifestation of the absolute confidence made you want to believe him unconditionally.

If you call it charisma then it was an atmosphere that screamed that, that is without a doubt what it was. That is the kind of air around Hasim.

“Since I’m in that kind of a position, depending on the way I do it I could manipulate the citizens without them ever finding out about it. I have that much skill in tricks and I’m rather good at acting as well.

That’s why, without the citizen’s finding out, I can serve you.

It will look like they are steps taken for the sake of Lemuse but in reality, it wouldn’t even be bothered with Lemuse’s future and would be the most supreme and free service... which I’ll give to you”

〔You're insane〕

For a moment, Fasalis almost said those words aloud.

Hasim, who looked extremely serious about doing something like that ended up making Fasalis, as a ruler, feel an intense sense of fear.

“As long as I’m alive Lemuse will be like a slave to you. If we do that then your country, though small, would be able to use all the talented people in another country for your own sake. It would be like plundering another country without actually having to go to war with it”

He could see an illusion.

Is the man in front of him really the same human as himself?

Wouldn’t it make more sense if that man were not a human but a different 〔something〕?

“What do you think, this is a guarantee. As long as I am alive, you won’t need to worry about being betrayed. I’ll take any form of pledge that you want. I’ll give the entirety of Lemuse to you”

A rather suspicious voice had entered his ears.

It was the kind of voice that would bring about a pleasurable feeling but in that moment, Fasalis felt a sense of fear from the bottom of his heart.

“—”

He’s a demon lord.

For a moment, such words floated up in Fasalis’ mind.

—One of the villainous demon lords of old which were written in old books in an exaggerated manner was actually standing right here.

—Isn’t he instead the real demon lord?

Whether it was Fasalis, Muran or Crisca, when they saw Hasim’s smiling face as he made that high and mighty declaration, all thought the same thing.

“...Y, you’ll be resented, Hasim. The long history that Lemuse has been built on, the

pride that it held, are you alone going to destroy that? —Will you end up... destroying it?"

It would be accompanied by an undeniable heavy pressure.

The kingdom that was built by his ancestors, he alone would end up destroying the entire thing.

If that sort of a thing did happen, then there was no way that Hasim would reach <Heaven> safely.

He wouldn't be allowed to ascend to heaven.

Being denounced by tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands, millions or even tens of millions of citizens of Lemuse, even if he dies he wouldn't be able to ascend and continue to suffer.

He would be separated from all other dimensions, the supreme loneliness.

He didn't even know if it was okay to sum it up in those few letters of loneliness, that was how unique that darkness would be.

—It's impossible.

Something like that is impossible for a single human to do.

A single human could never bear to destroy the fruit of the labour of an enormous number of people and time.

〔Humans don't have that much strength〕

If he were going to do something like that, then it would probably be better just to die.

“I'll do it. I'll do it, Fasalis”

However, as if having understood the unrest in Fasalis' mind, Hasim spoke while keeping his aqua blue eyes fixed on Fasalis.

It was a scary gaze.

It was extremely straightforward and—honest.

“You're insane, Hasim. That's something that a king should never say. Are you going to turn your citizens into slaves with your own hands?”

“If we lose then it’s over. In that case, I might as well give them a false happiness. Well, [ignorance is bliss] after all.

If we don’t get a proper victory against Mūzeg in this war then Lemuse will collapse in the future.

In that case, in the end I’ll at least give them a false public peace.

If we lose we die. If we have a half-assed victory then we end up as ignorant slaves. So this is probably what it means to burn one’s bridges.

—Haha!”

He laughed.

Hasim laughed.

And those eyes—

Were something that Fasalis thought to look into but then stopped himself.

If his eyes weren’t laughing then Hasim was [forcing] himself. That was what he predicted.

However, if even his eyes were coloured in laughter then...

He would no longer be able to see his friend as his friend anymore.

Which is why Fasalis hesitated to look into his eyes for an answer.

“—So, what do you think Fasalis? Are you satisfied?”

Suddenly Hasim returned to the topic so Fasalis lifted his face up.

When he looked at Hasim, his face had returned to the clever expression he had a little while back.

He couldn’t see the madness from a little while back on his face at all.

Which is why, Fasalis also answered.

“...Yeah, it fits well as an answer to my demand”

Leaving out the fact of whether it was the right thing to do or not, when thought of rationally, Filarfia did get the priority for restoration.

Which is why, as a political negotiation it was a success.

In the first place, if he had smiled at nodded when it was first suggested, he wouldn’t

have had to go through this suggestion.

However, Fasalis thought that he and Hasim were close so he ended up being concerned about Hasim's way of doing things.

—Am I just too naive?

Since it was Hasim, he probably thought of all of this before he spoke in the way he did.

In fact, Fasalis wanted to believe that, that was the case.

Coercion, fear, insanity, flattery.

Most probably, all of that were measures after carefully taking Fasalis' cautious nature into account.

—... Please be so.

That thought quietly swayed in Fasalis' heart.

“Alright, then let's get it in writing. Let's quickly conclude the *<Alliance of Four Kings>* and get discussing about the war”

Ignoring Fasalis, Hasim briskly took out a seal from his bosom and taking a paper from Aisha who had been standing to the side, he quickly stamped his seal into it. It seemed to be some form of a contract.

After just concluding this kind of a talk, he was already looking at the next one.

He was like a huge dragon who was only looking to the front and continued to push his way through.

That man could probably, very easily set up a coup d'etat and take over from that foolish king.

Looking at Hasim who had an expression that said, [everything went according to my expectations] while he took matters forward, the three kings had absolutely no complaints.

Chapter 45

Premonition of an Encounter

Once the conclusion of the Alliance of the Four Kings had been concluded, the four rulers went on to discuss about the tactics and strategies they could use against Mūzeg.

One point that all four rulers had a common view on was that it would be better to [take the first shot].

Hasim was the only one who had a different basis for that view, the other kings all shared the same view as well as the basis for it.

“If we don’t do something about Mūzeg quickly, we probably won’t be able to do anything about them in the future”

At the moment that the topic of a counter-offensive came up, the three kings made up their minds.

The reason that such a topic came up was because they were currently at a divide.

Whether to fight or to surrender, they had to make a decision and once that was made, there was no turning back.

On the contrary, Hasim had a different outlook.

In order to [save the demon lords], Hasim had to act as quickly as possible.

For Hasim, the option to surrender was not something that existed.
Moving forward was the only way.

He decided to carry out a coup d'etat as well as make the Alliance of Four Kings a reality.

If he screwed up even one of them, they would all be destroyed.

Even if he were to save the demon lords, he had to show the three kings that everything was on schedule and working well.

He should never let them know that the words he spoke to Crisca were lies.

While carrying out thoughts of such strategies, Hasim carried on with the conference of the four kings.



As the sun was sinking into the horizon, the conference finally came to an end.

Hasim himself couldn't possibly stay over in Zuria.

So he had the person who he had left in town as the point of contact, to stay over in the Castle of Zuria with Crisca's permission and went back to Lemuse.

Although he did disguise himself as he returned but, Hasim turned over to Aisha who was right next to him as they walked out of the castle's gate.

"It's really great that we don't need to crawl back through that excessively dusty passage on our way back huh?"

"Seriously"

Saying so, she slumped her shoulders with a fed up look.

At that point, as if they were waiting for the two to come out, someone ran towards them from within the crowd of people.

He was a man who looked like one of the commoners of Zuria and he melted well into the crowd.

However, only his beard alone was extremely well maintained and Hasim and Aisha who saw that beard immediately recognized who that man was.

"—Hasim-sama"

"I've kept you waiting huh, Reynald"

It was that Earl Reynald.

Reynald alone waited for Hasim and Aisha who invaded into Zuria's castle through a rather unusual route and couldn't help feeling extremely nervous the whole time.

Although while waiting he had been told by one of Aisha's spies that Hasim was doing fine and had made it through causing his waves of anxiety to settle down into ripples but until he actually saw them with his own eyes, that anxiety did not settle down at all.

So, he had found a tea shop with a terrace and sat down facing the castle gates with a town newspaper in hand, he paid full attention to the gates and finally noticed two people who looked like them coming out of the gates.

He quickly went and apologized to the shop owners for sitting too long and after leaving a large tip, he quickly walked towards those two.

“Sorry, it went on longer than I thought”

“No no, I already got a report from one of Aisha's [friends] that you managed to sneak in successfully, so I was able to calm down considerably. Though, I've kind of forgotten how many cups of tea I ended up drinking while waiting though”

“Haha, I'll reimburse it later as a state expense”

While taking a peak at Aisha while thinking, “As always, she leaves no gaps”, Hasim joked around with Reynald.

“Well then Hasim-sama, there is something I need to tell you immediately”

“Hm?”

Reynald curbed his happy expression and fixed his posture.

Hasim did not miss the fact that Reynald's expression turned rather grim.

Since he saw that expression, Hasim also fixed his posture and cleared his mind even though he was rather tired from the conference.

“Did something happen?”

“It's about the demon lords”

Reynald looked around to make sure that there were no people around before he spoke up.

“〔We found them〕. We found them but...”

“At last huh”, though he was about to think that, Hasim noticed that Reynald hadn’t quite finished yet so he readied himself for the rest.

“They are moving much faster than we had predicted. They have already left <The Duchy of Neuce Gauss> and are going towards the south and taking a slightly roundabout route and heading straight to Lemuse”

“That’s a better route than I could have hoped for. Although there was a slight ambiguity in the past about whether they were heading to the three kingdoms or to Lemuse but if they are heading to the south from Neuse Gauss then they’re definitely heading towards Lemuse. ——It’s definitely the ideal route”

Hasim wanted to add, “Our luck was good”. However, after seeing Reynald’s expression, he realised that, that wasn’t the only thing he wanted to report. That was why, he chose to decide later on whether their luck was actually good or not.

“——So? Did something happen that’s causing you anxiety?”

At Hasim’s prompt, Reynald nodded with a meek expression.

“...At the same time, there was a report that a battalion had set off from Mūzeg’s mainland. This information arrived by courier from the mainland so thinking about the time difference, it would be apt to think that Mūzeg would also have covered a considerable amount of distance already”

“——I see”

Hasim had slightly raised his brows but his expression really did not look like he was surprised.

“...I see, if that’s the case then the fact that the demon lords are fast would just end up in a neck-to-neck finish huh. I see, I see”

Hasim stroked his chin with his thumb while he was in deep thought and groaned several times.

“Well, we already expected there to be other armies coming out from Mūzeg’s mainland after all. Since Serius found the demon lords at the Sacred Mountain of Lindholm so it would be normal for him to send back an order to set up a search grid. This is probably the result of that.

—So, will the demon lords reach Lemuse before the army of Mūzeg reaches them?”

“I do not know, that alone is something I do not know”

“I expected as much. —Sorry Reynald, that was rather mean”

There is a time lag in information.

If they could see everything from high up in the sky then it would be a different situation but if they have to use birds or horses to relay that information then there would be a time lag no matter what.

Anticipating all of that, Hasim calculated everything but at the end of the day, they were just predictions.

Although he calculated various patterns by secluding himself in his room without food or sleep but even then there was no way to guarantee that his thoughts would be right on the mark.

Hasim understood the negative implications in Reynald’s “much faster than expected”. The demon lords were faster than what he had calculated their speed to be.

“A detour from the south huh”

Hasim murmured once more trying to get the information in order.

“—If they go too far to the south then that in itself has the possibility of being a problem huh”

The detour to the south was most probably because they expected pursuit from Mūzeg.

They were going around so that they could get away from Mūzeg.

At the same time, it was also a path that would also get them away from the three

kingdoms.

“If they do manage to properly get away from the malicious grasp of Mūzeg then I wouldn’t have any problems but...”

If the detour to the south actually manages to make them get away from Mūzeg’s grasp and they manage to follow through on their plan and make it to the end then it would be the best possible outcome.

Since he was able to get confirmation that they were headed towards Lemuse, he ended up hoping for that even more.

On the contrary, if Mūzeg managed to slip in between the demon lords and Lemuse, then there would definitely be a battle.

Hasim had of course, expected that situation as one of the possibilities.

Which was why he entered an alliance with the three kingdoms to combat that very situation.

However, in that situation, the fact that the demon lords are fast will end up being an issue.

“Seriously, being too excellent is in its own way quite problematic huh”

If they’re too fast then, the time between finding out where the battle is and the reinforcements from the three kingdoms arriving may not be enough.

If Mūzeg’s speed is also correspondingly fast then by the time they slip in between Lemuse and the demon lords then in that situation, Hasim wouldn’t have the time to be discussing strategies.

As soon as they meet, it would end up in a battle.

“If that happens then—the [place of war] becomes increasingly important...”

At the moment battle starts, the position of the army of the three kingdoms. The distance from that position to the battleground.

The presence of the possibility of encountering another battalion from Mūzeg while en route to the battleground.

When that is taken into consideration, the route they are taking with the detour to the south, ended up causing him some anxiety.

Even though it was Hasim's personal issue, he would prefer to avoid a battle in a place that is too close to Lemuse.

He didn't want any damage being spread towards the citizens.

“...By the way, can you get in touch with the demon lords from now? Well, it depends on how fast they are though—”

From Reynald's speech, he guessed that he had yet to make any contact with the demon lords.

It could be that he was looking towards the judgement of the commander before took any actions but it's not particularly bad to make contact with them.

Of course they had to be rather careful and [polite] but in the situation where the demon lords were being chased by another country, offering to cooperate could never end up being a negative mark for them.

While thinking that, he noticed that Reynald had a shadow fall over his face once more.

“That is...”

Reynald floated an expression that was partly troubled and partly like he had given up.

Hasim tilted his head in confusion and waited for Reynald's words.

“Uhm... , there was a <Land Dragon(Reirnote)> as well...”

“...”

Hasim and Aisha heard Reynald's words and simultaneously frowned.

Aisha managed to get back her calm countenance immediately but she still had a certain amount of restlessness about her.

On the contrary, Hasim did not try to ease his frown and instead heaved a large sigh.

“...Haa. No wonder my calculations were so off. Who would have thought that they'd use a Reirnote as transport...”

“True...”

“As if we could expect something like that from common folk!”, said Hasim and heaved another sigh.

“In that case, I suppose that he got far away quickly as soon as he confirmed them right?”

“Yes, that’s right.

There seemed to be someone with a extremely good eyesight and the information we gained from Sacred Mountain Lidholm was spread to our subordinates so based on all of that, they managed to judge that they were the group of demon lords. However, as I mentioned, contact in itself was...”

At Reynald’s answer, Hasim had this feeling of acceptance mixed in with regret.

“...Damn it, I seriously want to go over to the demon lords and call them idiots just once. At the worst possible time they ended up going past our expectations”

He spoke with a sigh, with a feeling of sadness and wryness mixed in.

Reynald wiped his sweat while he nodded at Hasim’s words.

“—Fuu... Well, let’s let it be for now. At the very least we’ve managed to get confirmation that they’re heading to Lemuse. We’ve also managed to get the vague information that they’re fast, so we can somehow calculate their position from the point where they were sighted.

In the worst case scenario, I don’t mind being the one who goes out to get in contact with them as well”

Hasim said that while waving his hand like it couldn’t be helped.

“I’ll ask just in case but it’s not like all the demon lords are riding on the land dragon right?”

“Ah, no, if that were the case then even I would be much more flustered”

While wiping his sweat, it seemed like Reynald had enough leeway to talk frivolously. Then, with his beard shaking a little, he told Hasim the rest of the information with a

serious expression.

“—There are other horses as well. They seem to be considerably swift horses as well. They seem to have put all of their luggage onto the land dragon so the horses seem to be able to move at a considerable speed.

...Though, there seems to be quite the distance between the horses and the land dragon though”

“Of course that'd be so. The horses would be terrified of the land dragon. —They're not using the land dragon to spur the horses on from behind are they?”

That sounded like some sort of a joke.

After he lightly said that, Hasim quickly returned back on topic.

“Well, whatever. Let's just keep in mind that they're fast”

Saying that, Hasim immediately started walking.

Since they had already finished talking about the main topic, he figured it would be fine even if they spoke while walking.

Reynald and Aisha matched Hasim's pace and they all started walking down Zuria's roads.

“At any rate, the preparations of the demon lords are oddly quick. Do they have some sort of an intermediary in the Duchy of Neuce Gauss?

...If we think about the money involved as well, then the Alchemy King sounds the most suspicious. That entire family has been famous for having become rich after all. Though a few generations ago due to the mistake of the Alchemy King of that time, they lost their fame just once but—”

Hasim made a vague guess.

“If the current Alchemy King has inherited that blood then it's possibly that he's become rich again under a false name. —A money grubber tends to be a rather deep-rooted existence.

A half-assed money grubber would end up ruining themselves but if they properly toe the line then they would end up being very tenacious”

“It could be exactly as you say”

“—hmm”

While Hasim spoke up a little sarcastically but he kept thinking properly about it in his mind

Hasim suddenly stopped walking, not even having walked a few steps he quickly spoke up.

“—No, wait. I have a bad feeling about this... I just remembered something about that [land dragon]”

The topic suddenly changed and returned to the present.

However, neither Reynald nor Aisha interrupted him.

On the contrary, since Hasim had an expression like he had just realised something, they felt their bodies stiffen up a little.

“Quite a while back, I heard a rumor about a land dragon while drinking in a bar in Lemuse’s capital”

At that time it would have been easy to reject that rumour as nonsense that someone came up with after having had too much to drink.

In the first place, it could be considered quite amazing that he even remembered such a rumour from a place as random as a bar.

However, Hasim himself had remembered that piece of information and hadn’t discarded it.

“It was a rumour that there was a sparse group of land dragons to the west of the three kingdoms”

“Sparse huh?”

“That’s right. Land dragons are societal creatures, so their groups are rather large as well.

Which is why the fact that it was sparse ended up making me feel rather uneasy about it”

He, of course, could not know why that group was sparse.

However, that had vaguely been a source of anxiety for Hasim.

Hasim immediately turned on his heel and quickly started walking towards Zuria’s

castle once more.

“I’ll quickly go back and tell Muran and the rest to hasten their pace.

Reynald, you inform the spies in Mūzeg that a few of them should stay back. I’m worried about the army that has begun moving as well but there’s no guarantee that something strange won’t start moving after a while.

〔Don’t just pay attention to the battalion〕, make sure you inform the spies that.

It’s quite possible that, that sort of a flashy movement is part of a diversion after all.

After realising that, though I don’t know if the information will make it in time but I feel that we should definitely try”

While giving these orders to Reynald, Hasim looked down at the ground.

Without blinking even once, he kept staring at the ground.

Actually, at that point it seemed like he wasn’t even using his sight anymore.

It seemed like he was using every nerve in his body to think of strategies instead.

“As you command”

“Yeah, I’ll leave it to you”

After getting his orders Hasim, Reynald quickly left that place.

From Hasim’s words, he got the meaning of 〔move immediately〕 and so he promptly sprung into action.

Aisha, who was still standing there, just looked over at Hasim who was still in deep thought with a worried look on her face and waited for him to speak.

So that she didn’t get in his way, she made sure he was not disturbed even with her worried gaze and just quietly stood at his side.

After a while, as if he had finally got his thoughts in order, Hasim seemed to come back to himself.

He looked up from the ground that he had been staring at and turned his gaze to the sky and watched the clouds that were floating around relaxedly before he finally turned his gaze towards Aisha.

His face had a gentle smile on it.

“—Well then, I’m bothered by the demon lords movements as well but in the

meantime, I'll just pray that they don't meet with the enemy in the worst possible place with the worst possible encounter"

No matter how much he predicted situations but as long as the predictions were about other people, there was always the possibility that they would go above and beyond his predictions.

"Seriously, not being able to get your way seems to be usual now"

Hasim did not doubt that this was the way of the world.

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Chapter 46

The Reason for his Fragility

“I wonder about this...”

“About what?”

It had been exactly one day since they had met up with the black scaled land dragon <Noel>.

At first the demon lords couldn't help feeling a slight fluffy feeling as they watched Noel running up ahead but eventually they started feeling glad that it turned out well.

Merea who was exclusively riding on top of Noel couldn't help but have a hard time as Noel, who seemed to be extremely happy to have his benefactor on his back, kept jumping around in excitement. After around half a day passed in this manner, he finally managed to master riding on Noel's back.

So, they reached the morning of the second day.

Everyone cooperated each time they stopped to sleep and would once again place all their luggage onto Noel's back.

They would do it like they once did on the sacred mountain with the gravestones, like a conveyor belt.

The last point of that smooth system would be when the luggage would reach Merea who was on Noel's back.

Merea would take the luggage and tie it onto Noel's back with rope.

At that time, Salman looked towards the distance at Merea's back and spoke up.

With the twins at his side being as boisterous as ever, he unconsciously took the luggage passed to him from the left and passed it to the right.

The one who was taking the luggage from him on his right was the <Sword Emperor> Elma.

She may have been pulled along by Lilium for a bath because her black hair was still a little moist.

There was a sweet fragrance wafting from her which favored her elegance, causing her beauty to have an added sex appeal to it.

“—Hm, did you manage to take a shower?”

“Yeah, thanks to the twins. Are you people okay like that?”

“It’s fine with it being appropriate right? I’ll anyway end up being showered with water as a prank anyway so I’m better off not bothering too much about it”

“To have the fact that you’ll be pranked as a premise... you have your own problems huh...”

That day, Elma had a considerably brighter expression than she had shown until that point.

The troubled expression that she had had since the Duchy of Neuce Gauss had settled down quite a bit and her expression had turned considerably gentler, to the point that you could even say that her troubles had been blown away.

“So, I’d like to know what you meant by, [I wonder about this...]”

Elma took the opportunity when the luggage stopped coming for a moment and pushed her moist bangs behind her ear as she asked Salman about his earlier grumble.

Salman intentionally did not touch on her change in expression and decided instead to answer her question.

“—I’ve been feeling this strange [discomfort] coming from Merea for a while now. I’m not able to pinpoint the reason for that discomfort clearly though.

Vaguely... well... I’m not able to put it in words properly but, it’s like looking into a frosted glass.

Especially recently, everytime I look at Merea I feel like that. —Do you know anything?”

“Who knows? In the first place, he looks normal to me though”

Elma replied to Salman with a puzzled expression.

As soon as she replied to him, she turned her gaze towards the distant Merea.

“Ahh, that’s nice, you seem quite insensitive too”

“Wh! Y, you making fun of me? I’m really sharp! I’ve even heard that a woman who’s perceptive of others emotions is well liked!

That’s why, well, you know, that! —Hey! Since I’m sharp I can kill anyone! I’m sharp!”

“That way of getting flustered is pretty horrible... And don’t just pull your demon sword out! —Idi, don’t swing it around you idiot!”

Salman somehow managed to remonstrate Elma who suddenly turned red and started swinging her demon sword around. It seemed like he had somehow broached a topic that really shouldn’t have.

Next to him, the twins started yelling, “Bull’s-eye” “Elma bull’s-eye!” striking the final blow to her.

“Oi, idiots, don’t keep talking about that. She seems to be the type who’s really bothered by the fact that she’s like a warrior and doesn’t have many womanly aspects! If you go too far she’ll cry you know. So just keep quiet for a while, okay? —I’ll give you candy”

“Really?” “How many?”

“Hmm..., 5 pieces for both of you”

“5 pieces... got it!” “No objections!”

Salman took out 5 pieces of candy wrapped in paper from inside his bosom and handed it over to the twins.

They quickly took the candy one by one, opened the paper and stuffed the candy into their mouths.

With their gorgeous blue hair swinging around, the two ate the candy while saying things like, “The candy of Neuce Gauss is tasty!” or “The money grubber said that there is even tastier candy in the south, onee-chan!” and seemed to have stopped teasing

Elma for the moment.

With a feeling like he just finished a job, Salman wiped his sweat and turned his sight back to Elma.

“Well, with that done with”

“...I’ll be protesting later about how you naturally considered me to be insensitive”

“Got it, got it, I’ll listen to it properly later”

Giving a fed up look, he brought the conversation back to the original topic.

“—So, as I thought, Merea seems somewhat... how should I put it... fragile?”

“Fragile?”

“Yeah, his presence. —No, he’s quite brilliant. He’s got a strength like a demon god and his presence is also extraordinary—”

After those words there was a slight pause.

Immediately after, Salman looked like he himself realised something and spoke up.

“— [On the battlefield] ”

“That’s true huh. No matter who sees it, he’d definitely be seen as brilliant. It was like looking at one of the heroes from legends up close. They’d be dramatized, they’d be exaggerated and have a strange sort of persuasion, the people who come out in those legends.

The stories of heroes that we can enjoy on the streets are generally just success stories and seem to give a strange sort of relief but—embracing that sort of a relief is rather dangerous huh”

Elma obediently nodded to Salman’s words.

Even Elma had the extraordinary presence of Merea on the battlefield burned into her mind.

Against Mūzeg’s group technique, he managed to pull it off all on his own and after that he went on to use various other techniques and not to mention even his combat

skills displayed a lot of strength.

Even if someone was like was called the demon god, no one would disagree.

“Even then, the moment we step away from the battlefield, the air around Merea became rather dull. The air around him seemed to get the same coloured blur as his hair, it’s rather hard to keep watching him like that”

“That’s why you said, it’s like looking into a frosted glass huh... Still, that expression is like something you’d hear from a poet huh. You a bachelor, Salman? This level of delicacy isn’t something I’d have expected from someone with the title of Fist Emperor though”

“Don’t just assume that I’m muscle brained! You might be like that though. ——Ahh, I’ll take that back, so let’s put that demon sword back okay?”

Noticing that Elma had gone red again and was reaching for here sword again, Salman quickly tried to calm her down.

“You on the other hand seem to have more of a presence when you’re not on the battlefield huh... You seem more human I suppose. Well, you’ve been making a scary face for a while now but that in it’s own way made it seem like, [that’s just her huh] ”

“Are you insulting me?”

“No i’m not. On the contrary, I’m complimenting you”

Salman once again took the luggage from the left and passed it onto the right.

“You’re complimenting me huh. It’s really hard to tell”

With a “Hmmm” Elma looked at Salman doubtfully while she, similarly took the luggage and passed it along.

“——Ah, is it [that] ?”

“What is it? Did you understand something?”

While looking at Elma, as if he had realised something, he spoke up.

“—You, you’re quite cute huh”

“!! Wha, what’re you saying?!”

Looking straight at Elma’s face, Salman said that with a straight face.

In the next instant, for the third time, Elma blushed and started waving her hands in front while facing Salman.

It was like she was an embarrassed girl saying, “Don’t come any closer to me!”

Although she was that peerless on the battlefield but, the moment she steps away from the battlefield, she turns into a rather innocent young girl.

—That’s what her reaction was like.

Though it might be the rather normal reaction but considering that none of them actually lived in a normal environment, Elma’s normal reaction instead started looking a little lovely.

There was also a gap when compared to her usual cold beauty appearance but over and above everything, Elma’s [humanity] could be seen there.

“Ahh, I was joking”

“I’m going to cut you. I’m seriously going to cut you”

“Well, anyway”

“Y, you! You let it slide! You’re a horrible man...!”

While waving Elma’s reproach away with one hand, Salman had an expression like he was in deep thought.

“Hmm”, he raised a dull voice and looked up at the sky and watched the clouds float by.

“That’s normal. You have your awareness on yourself. If I take it further then you’re [grounded] as well”

“I have my awareness on myself?”

“—Right”

Salman’s gaze fell from the clouds and he looked directly at Elma with his sand coloured eyes.

“You were happy enough at being called cute to the point your face became red right?”

“We, well... thn...”

“She fumbled!” “She fumbled~”, just at that moment the twins jumped into the situation. Though without even a moment passing, Salman flicked their foreheads.

“Auuuu” “Even though you’re just a Saru!” While holding down their bumps, the twins look up at Salman with tears in the corner of their eyes.

They used their small hands and kept hitting Salman on his stomach but he didn’t really pay much mind to them and just noncommittally placed his hands on their heads and stroked them.

More than anything, he seemed to be concentrated on Elma.

“That’s just proof that you’re aware of yourself”

“Is there even anyone who’s not aware of themselves?”

With her face still slightly red, she asked Salman.

“Well, there probably aren’t many. Anyone would first think about themselves. I think that is fine in itself. Someone who thinks first about others sounds somewhat suspicious after all.

—Of course, saving someone is a great thing but even then, thinking about yourself first and then being able to think about someone else... that would probably be the best, I think”

“You’re putting up complicated logic once again huh”

“Hmm, don’t you get this strange feeling? Well, It does feel like there’s no clear answer

there though... The difference between the facade and real feelings are thin after all, at least for this talk. There might even be people who place their lives on the line with just the facade”

“Hmm... No, I get it. Leaving oneself be and giving priority to others, I somewhat get that people like that are kind of suspicious”

Elma nodded with a serious expression.

“Even mercenaries, if they end up taking jobs for free then they’d end up being suspected instead. It’s an extreme example but, isn’t that how giving priority to others is like?”

At the very least, if it were a mercenary who would take up a job that would put their very lives on the line for free then it would really be a rather suspicious situation. Since they didn’t take money so the responsibility would be a little vague and they would keep thinking about when the mercenary would leave them and run away—not to mention, if I were the one hiring then I would definitely not want to take someone for free”

“That’s right! There’s nothing more expensive than free!”

There was one eccentric who immediately reacted to the word **〔free〕** and started shouting from far away.

Both Salman and Elma ignored him and continued with their conversation.

“Your logic is strange as well but well, something like that. At any rate, that’s what I’m talking about. Merea seems to be **〔close〕** to that. Ah, I’ll just say this to be clear but I’m not suspicious of Merea, okay?”

“I get it. —But what do you mean? You’ve been talking in a roundabout way for a while now”

Elma tilted her head in confusion.

At Elma’s indication, Salman said “Got it, got it” and while shrugging his shoulders, he resolved himself to speak.

“Merea stood on the battlefield in order to try and save us. And then, this is just my supposition but...”

Salman looked up and over at Merea who was sitting on top of Noel with a smile as if he were trying to cheer everyone up.

“That thought is preceding everything else. That’s why, other than that, I can’t seem to see his own [ambition] or [desire] in him”

“...”

“Although I can make an excuse like, we’ve just met but even then I’ve been watching everyone in the surroundings and I’ve gotten a decent grasp on the other demon lord’s thoughts but even though I’ve spoken quite a lot with Merea, I still can’t see anything from him.

The only thing I can see is his strong determination to somehow save the demon lords. But that is somehow... wrong”

After passing a fleeting gaze over the other demon lords, Salman returned his gaze to Elma.

“If he didn’t have that [kind of a starting] then maybe even Merea may have had his own wishes or dreams, is what I can’t help but think. That too, a dream or wish that has nothing to do with a battlefield. If I say it in more worldly words, then a more [honest] and clean dream.

Merea sometimes shows a sparkling expression like a curious child doesn’t he? Also, he says funny things and makes people laugh. And then he also looks out for everyone. —That part, really doesn’t feel like he’s the same age, that’s how weird his balance is... Or at least he should have”

However,

“There is a haze around that honest side of his. Though I’ve only seen that honest side of his a few times so, I’m honestly unsure of what to decide on that. That’s why I’m having this talk with you after all”

Salman laughed in a self-deprecating way but Elma didn’t laugh at Salman.

In the current situation, where everyone had their hands full with their own matters, she instead held a certain kind of reverence for him for actually being able to think about other people.

She had no desire to make fun of him.

“—It’s possible that, that [haze] might be a side effect of having been stuck in Lindholm Sacred Mountain till now, not coming out at all. A side effect of having come out into the world for the first time”

“Side effect?”

“Yeah. —He’s too innocent about the world. Since his container had nothing in it, when something did start to enter it, the container started to fill in. And so, the first things that filled it in was the strong desire or impulse to [save the other demon lords]. An unnecessarily heavy and large, while still being a bright wish.

Even though it’s heavy and large but since it shines so brightly, even if he wanted to throw it away he’s not able to.

If seen by a third person then it’s a humongous [luggage]. Merea himself probably doesn’t think of it as luggage though”

“If he thought that, he’d probably throw it away right?”, Salman smiled bitterly and made a gesture like throwing something away.

“I see, shining... huh?”

“I’ll just say this but this is just my guess”

“I got that”

When Salman cautioned her, Elma couldn’t help smiling bitterly and nod.

“So, if that kind of a wish is poured into his container, what would happen?”

“He won’t have the leeway to pay attention to anything else. For example, any [extremely personal urge] he himself would have after coming out into the world is something that may come up in his mind but it’ll end up being ignored”

“I see”

“Thanks to that, his current wishes are all centered around others. Having himself as the center, in other words, self-centered selfishness is something that he doesn’t have any of.

That kind of selfishness tends to bring out [their character] which is why, since I can't seem to see much of that sort of a selfishness in him, Merea seems to be covered in a haze"

"That's why he seems fragile and insecure... huh?"

"Yeah, that's the source of the discomfort I feel from Merea.

—Strong. Exceptionally strong. Even then, a sense of fragility and insecurity that makes it feel like he'll disappear if I touch him.

Also, most probably—"



—It's our fault.



Salman had a pale blue light in his eyes. Blue—it was the colour of sadness.

"We've ended up putting such a heavy load onto someone who's just stepped out into the world so he doesn't seem to see anything but that. When we were riding on horses, his back felt like it was giving out an amazing amount of bloodthirst so, it could be that he was mentally preparing himself for the next battlefield"

"...you're a dutiful man huh"

"You can't say much about others you know"

Salman finally touched on the change in Elma's expression.

—It seems like it took quite a lot of time to organize your thoughts"

While simply implying, "I noticed how you were worried all this time", Salman floated a slightly sarcastic smile.

Elma on the other hand hung her head in shame but in the next moment, she had a serious expression as she replied.

"...It's not like I managed to figure everything out. However, I'm not exactly on the

bright side so even though I worried so much about it, but when I hit a point where there was nothing that could be done about it, I decided to give up on it.

—Now I'll just leave it to my own instincts. In the event that it's needed, I'll be able to take actions that would be [like me], that's the kind of thinking and life I've led so far.

Personality is something that comes out even without thinking about it, it's also not something that we ourselves can decide upon after all"

"Haha, you look much more refreshed now, so I think that's a good way to go about things"

Salman laughed joyfully.

At the same time, in his mind he whispered, "She's fine now huh".

He had expected to some extent as to how her personality would come out, which is why even though he knew there was nothing he could do to help her out,

—Following up with that is the job of the people around them huh.

He nodded slightly thinking that.

He once again moved his gaze towards Merea.

The last piece of luggage had finally reached him at that moment.

“—However, it seems like since Merea has a rather touch spirit, he's thinking about nothing but that. Since he's able to take it all, he's not able to throw it out.

After thinking about all the possibilities, he keeps thinking about how to protect us—he's always thinking that”

Salman gave out a conclusion in the end.

“...I see. There is an excuse that he didn't bother even though he was in that extreme situation but the responsibility of having put him there is with us. —We can't forget that”

Elma as well looked over at Merea who was sitting on top of Noel, placing the luggage onto his back.

He happily caught the luggage which was thrown from below and placed it on Noel's

back.

He had a smiling face.

He had a smiling face but,

—Is he actually laughing or not?

Elma suddenly thought that when she saw Merea.

“But, we can’t really do anything about it anymore. That’s what I think. Most probably, that’s a role is something that Merea alone can play.

The other demon lords might just end up getting crushed”

“That might be true”

“If we think of it that way, Merea who’s able to bear with everything in that position can, in one way be said to be like him but— even that is desire of the [battlefield] huh... It’s rather difficult huh. I don’t know what we should do”

Elma spoke those words subconsciously.

Even though Elma herself hadn’t noticed but because she obediently thought that she wanted to do something for him was probably why she said those words.

Having figured out to a certain extent about herself, Elma’s first worry was about Merea.

As if he had been waiting for those words of hers, Salman spoke,

“Then, you go tell him”

He had a grin plastered on his face.

With that grin on his face, he pointed towards Merea with his chin with gesture like, “Go on now”.

“Hm? What do you mean go?”

Elma on the other hand had a confused look on her face.

Salman quickly spoke up again.

“You go and plant some [ambition] or [desires] in Merea. Or if that’s not possible then pull them out”

“Eh? M, me? ——You’re the one who’s been paying attention to everyone right? It doesn’t have to be me——”

“After all, it’s a pain. Well, I’ve been bothered for so long so my shoulders are all stiff. ——It’s your job from now on okay? I’m rather delicate after all, so I might just think too much about it and get troubled over it after all~”

“Su, suspicious... But, I’m not very good at talking so I’m not really that capable in such situations though...”

While looking at Salman, who had started to intentionally roll his shoulders, with reproachful eyes, Elma put her fingers together and started looking rather perplexed.

“Not to mention, having such a talk between men is still a little embarrassing”

“What’s with that? It’s fine if it’s a woman? More like, saying something like go plant some desire in him sounds a little like [that]”

“Isn’t that fine? In the first place, as long as it’s a desire that’s based on himself then anything is fine, so you go use that body of yours and seduce him. If we don’t establish some form of desire or wish that has nothing to do with the battlefield in him then when it comes to the point where his life is in danger then he may not even have the desperate thought of, [I need to live on no matter what].

That’s why, first of all——let’s see..., [if you come back alive from the battlefield then I’ll let you embrace me] or something like that is fine”

“Embrace~” “Embrace!”

“You two, stop reacting to the weirdest points!”

The twins had grins on their faces as they looked up at Elma.
Elma herself was,

“.....!”

She had her face turn even further red than it had so far and with her lips heaving, she

glared at Salman.

“Huh? Are you in fact quite innocent when it comes to these things? —Crap, seriously?

Since you’re that much of a beauty I thought you’d have quite a bit of experience though...”

Of course Salman’s idea had been a [joke].

Since she had become that flustered from just being called “cute” so he figured that she was quite innocent.

Which was why most of his words were just mischief on his part.

Since he already knew, he acted as if he was surprised.

Elma on the other hand,

“...I can do it! I can definitely do it! I’ll be back!!”

“Oka~y, see you~”

“See you~” “Embrace~”

With her shoulders heaving in anger, she quickly walked towards where Merea was. Salman, who was left behind, opened his mouth,

“She’s quite easy to handle huh...?”

“Easier to handle than when you use candy?” “Easier?”

“Ahh, she might be easier than you guys... , actually, you guys are aware that you’re easy to handle...?”

When Salman alternated looking between the twins faces, they looked at each other once and then spoke.

“It’s the candy’s fault!” “A magical weapon...!”

“Haaa.....”

After heaving a sigh looking at the realistic facial expressions of the twins, Salman

once again looked at Elma's retreating figure.

Elma, who was walking towards Merea, didn't have any of insecurity that she had showing a little while back.

“—Seriously, women are much stronger when it comes to situations like this huh. Men strangely care about appearances after all. I wonder if I should call it cowardly or what...”

Salman smiled bitterly and with a little self-mockery mixed in, he whispered that to himself.

And,

—Sorry.

In the end, he didn't speak out loud but in his mind he apologized to someone. He couldn't put that out into words.

If he ended up saying it then, it would end up decisively denying the [current feelings] of the person who reached the very edge just to save them.

—I... can't say it.

Even though he said that, he understood.

The foolishness of the man who could easily put his life on the line for others and would consider himself as secondary.

Whether that's a good thing or a bad thing, he couldn't come out with a clear answer to that.

From perspective of Elma or others who stand on the battlefield, they may say something like, “That's just prejudice, something like the difference between men and women doesn't matter”, but Salman himself was rather sensitive to the differences between men and women.

At a time like this, men are strangely liable to be swayed by beliefs and appearances.

If a woman makes a breakthrough then just a line can pass through. That was Salman's rule of thumb.

For a moment, Salman had the image of his mother cross his mind.

“Oi, give me one of the candy I gave you earlier. I want to have one too”

“Ehhh, Saru has many more~” “Monopoly~”

“No, the ones I gave you earlier are the only ones I had of that kind. The light blue ones. Light blue. —More like, you guys’ taste is too biased. No to mention you keep demanding just that. You’re oddly stubborn, even though you’re little girls!”

“You called us little girls again!” “Start calling us young girls already! Or more like use our names!”

“Ahh, after a little while maybe”

Saying so, Salman took the light blue candy that the twins handed him reluctantly and put it in his mouth.

A sweet and sour flavor spread in his mouth. With the feeling of elegant fragrant herbs being released, a cool fragrance drifted from his nose. The specialty candy of the Duchy of Neuce Gauss had a somewhat similar feeling to the town itself.

The hazy feeling that he had felt like it was wrapped up in the sweet and refreshing fragrance and flavor and was washed away somewhere.

—Sweet.

“Ahh, the last one...” “I suggest that, since there is no more light blue ones left, the next time you give us candy it should be double the quantity!”

“Oh shut up. Candy is not discriminated by the colour they were born with. They all have their own flavor”

“Puuu—” “Noo~”

“Haha”

While laughing, his sand coloured eyes looked into the distance at the white hair that was waving in the wind and just watched it for a while.

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Chapter 47

A Dream Belonging to a Battlefield

“Merea!”

“Hm?”

As Merea was tying up the last of the luggage onto Noel’s back, he heard someone call out his name.

When he shifted his gaze to the direction in which he was called from, he could see Elma standing there with a red face and a rather daunting pose.

With both her hands on her hips and a straight posture, she showed a strong figure like that of a warrior but her slightly moist eyes and her face which was dyed red gave more of a feeling of being a girl rather than a warrior. Since Merea had to look down on her, her looking up with that expression just added to that impression even more.

“I, I need to talk to you!”

“Talk? ——Okay, I don’t mind, just wait for a bit”

“Got it!!”

She’s unnecessarily high tension huh, while thinking that Merea sped up his work of tying up the luggage.

At that time, they still had to care for the horse’s legs as well so they probably had some time to talk.

Maybe because they were used to travelling but there were a few demon lords who were used to taking care of the horses and they took care of it in those situations. ——Well, there was a rather pitiful reason that it would be better to leave everything to them than for amateurs to take care of it.

Which is why, in that period people would have time on their hands.
Of course Merea had never taken care of horses. Not to mention, in the current situation, he couldn't even ride on a horse.
So the partner he was riding on now was,

“You’re sturdy enough not to even need care huh...”

“Gya?”

For the time being, it didn’t seem like he needed any care.
With his eyebrows drooping a little, Merea laughed and stroked Noels neck.

If he just wiped the dust off of the sturdy looking, smooth to touch black scales then they would start shining brightly.

Noel twisted his neck back and looked over at Merea with a questioning look as if to say, “Are you done with packing the luggage?”.

“—Alright”

“Gyau!”

Merea was slightly entranced by the Noel’s black scales but he soon remembered about Elma and quickly finished up tying all the luggage and then he lightly struck Noel’s back.

Noel, who had been sitting still waiting for all the luggage to be loaded, started shaking his left and right as if to loosen his muscles.

The luggage on his back made a clattering noise as they struck his body but it didn’t seem like they would fall off that easily.

Seeing that, Merea nodded and then finally got off of Noel’s back.



Elma was standing with her back to one of the rocks in the surroundings.

With her head facing down, as if she was completely absorbed in her thoughts, she kept staring down at the ground.

As she lightly played around with a pebble near her toes, it seemed rather obvious that her mind was elsewhere.

“Sorry for the wait”

He lightly raised his hand spoke up.

Elma suddenly raised her head causing her moist black hair to sway.

“—!”

As if her mouth wasn't able to keep up with her mind, she didn't seem like she could speak immediately.

As usual her face was a little red and her eyes were moist.

As soon as he noticed that, Merea's consciousness was diverted to her entire body. Although it was a little late now but, when he once again looked at her,

—She's pretty.

He thought that.

Her appearance that he could see from the side, that cold beauty with her slender limbs made her look like she was some kind of an art sculpture.

A beautiful appearance.

Even then, within that gorgeousness there was a hint of innocence in her that made it her characteristic atmosphere.

If you could feel a strength in the fact that she trained herself in an unwomanly manner but when you see the refinement in her beauty and the innocence in her mannerism makes her unspeakably lovable.

Various words of praise floated up in Merea's mind but when he thought it through then he could summarize it in one word.

—Yeah, she's pretty.

Not just her appearance.

He felt that one word encompassed her looks, air and her personality as well.

“Did you wait long?”

“Aa, ah... ah, no, I, I didn’t wait long”

Her voice was shaking a little.

It was as if she was nervous about something but what exactly she was nervous about was not something that Merea could understand.

“So, what did you want to talk about?”

“...”

Merea walked over to Elma’s side and like her leaned his back on the rock as he asked her.

Elma didn’t reply immediately.

He figured that she was probably thinking about how to start talking so Merea decided to wait for a while.

After a little while had passed, Elma finally opened her mouth.

At just a glance it was obvious that her face was considerably redder than it had been till then.

“W, werr...”

—She bit her tongue.

Without saying that out loud, Merea thought so in his mind.

Elma made a “Gohon” sound and cleared her throat before she spoke up again.

“W, well...”

In the first place, the very fact that she started talking to him like a stranger made it feel odd but Merea kept quiet so that he didn’t break her chain of thought.

Instead, he had an innocent look in his eyes as he asked her.

“What?”

Elma on the other hand looked like she became even more nervous seeing his gaze.

“! Werr... , nnn,... well, that... A, are you doing well?”

After biting her tongue again, she pushed it back and in exchange asked a harmless question.

The question was so harmless a question that it was instead incredibly out of place.

“I’m fine, I’m fine. Completely fine”

“Is that so...”

Elma had an expression that practically said, “I finished the first job~” with how relieved she looked. —Not a single thing was resolved though.

However, Elma didn’t plan on finishing up there so she made a stern expression and once again asked Merea a question.

“Merea”

“Yeah”

“D, Do you have any desires?”

“Desires...?”

The contents of that question were a little too vague.

Around three question marks floated up in Merea’s mind.

—Is she talking about the three major desires...?

Putting aside a wish or a dream, he ended up thinking that what she meant by desire would naturally be about that.

Though, normally people wouldn’t ask about something that obvious that everyone has.

So if he assumed that to be true then what she probably meant was whether he had a more personal, something like a dream or so he ended up interpreting on his own.

Which is why,

“I do though?”, He replied.

“!! I, is that so..., as expected Merea is a man as well huh... If you’re a man... there’s no helping it... more like, if you didn’t have it then it would probably be a little unhealthy huh...”

“...?”

While trembling a little, Elma turned her moist eyes down to the ground. Merea no longer had any idea as to what was going on.

In any case, if the current situation time would just slip past them.

To help her feel less nervous, he felt like if he asked her a question then the conversation would probably move forward.

Thinking that, Merea spoke up again.

“What about Elma?”

“Wh, what? Me? Y, you really have a fearless way of asking such things to a woman huh”

Merea asked the same question back to Elma but her reply was a little strange.

“—I, I do. Obviously I do too”

“Heee, what kind of?”

“Wh, what kind?! You’re even going to ask me that?!”

“Ehh?! Is it wrong to ask that?!”

Elma looked like her head would burst open from the sheer heat of her embarrassment and had an extremely red face while she yelled at Merea with an astonished expression.

At Elma’s words, Merea ended up staggering a little.

“—I, it’s not like it’s wrong to ask but..., you really don’t have much delicacy... I’m still a woman you know...”

“Yeah, I get that? Elma’s quite the beauty after all”

“!!”

At Merea’s honest words Elma’s shoulders immediately reacted with a twitch.

In the next moment, as if she were trying to run from Merea’s gaze, Elma turned to the side.

It was a gesture like she was trying to say, “Something more”.

Though Merea tilted his head in confusion at her gesture but he somehow understood her meaning and spoke,

“—Cute?”

Merea saw that Elma made a gesture of putting her thumb up. It seemed like she was satisfied with his words.

With her face looking the other way, she covered her face with an arm in an embarrassed way and let her gaze swim around on the ground.

Although it was a slightly shameless request but that in itself also showed her innocence once more.

Elma still kept facing a different direction and tried desperately to cover her face with one arm but from the gaps a strange laughter could be heard.

Since, even though she felt that embarrassed she couldn’t stop her laughter from how happy she felt, Merea couldn’t help being drawn in and laugh as well.

“Haha, you’re cute. —Yeah, I feel that even more strongly since you’re so honestly happy about it”

Elma covered her face with both her hands and trembled while even her ears had turned red.

“...Th, thank you”

Suddenly Elma replied with a high pitched voice.

Either she still couldn't look at Merea in the eye or maybe she just glanced at him quickly but her words were clear.

At this pace Elma may not be able to raise her face anymore, Merea thought that and with his back still to the rock, he looked up at the sky.

After a little while, he could feel a warmth from his side. Somehow it seemed like she had calmed down.

He noticed from the corner of his eye that she was standing next to him and similarly looking up at the sky.

Somehow the distance seemed to have become closer, it could be her way of apologizing for the rudeness of having faced away from him for a while.

"S, sorry. I'm not very used to being called [cute] so, my desires ended up coming out suddenly..."

"Hee, that's unexpected"

"I'm normally swinging a sword after all"

"Ahh—That's how it is huh"

Definitely, if she was seen on the battlefield then cute wouldn't be a word that would come out normally.

Beauty or beautiful might come out but cute probably wouldn't come out.

As he was thinking these things, suddenly Elma changed the topic.

"—I have a dream that has nothing to do with battlefields"

The tension from earlier seemed to have loosened up considerably and she started speaking smoothly.

Her tone had turned quite serious as well.

While continuing to stare at the sky, Merea nodded lightly and listened to her speak.

"Even like this, I've wanted to live like a normal woman. In other words... you know, I

wanted... to have a family”

“That’s a nice dream”

In order not to get in the way for her thoughts, Merea replied shortly.

“But, it seems like I don’t really have the talents for such things. I keep failing, time and again. I’ve never managed to do anything that was like a normal woman. Ever since I became a mercenary, it was even more so”

“Since you’re such a beauty, wouldn’t you be really popular?”

“Since mercenaries are mainly men, if I said that I wasn’t popular one bit then that’d be a lie but, when they see me use the demon sword they all end up running away. Well, I doubt it’d be much different even without the demon sword though. In the end, it seems like they couldn’t handle a woman more skilled than themselves”

“—I see”

He just accepted it without affirming or negating her.

Although he could feel Elma stirring next to him, he didn’t look towards her.

“Well, I also had a [dream belonging to a battlefield] so I didn’t mind it much”

“Dream belonging to a battlefield?”

“—Like my ancestors, I wanted to become a hero as well. A hero who saved someone”

Merea felt his chest grow slightly heavy.

She had the same wish as he did.

At the same time, he suddenly felt like he realised something when he noticed that, that was a [dream belonging to a battlefield] for Elma.

“But, that alone would leave me haggard. —There’s a saying that’s been passed down in the Elisa family”

“...what is it?”

“Along with a dream belonging to a battlefield, have a dream that has nothing to do with one. The dream outside the battlefield will lead you to return alive”

“—Those are some nice words”

“Yeah... In the end, if someone only has dreams that belong on a battlefield then they'll end up not being able to return back to their daily life. They would end up unable to return from the battlefield and fall into ruin. Since those are words from my ancestors who, as mercenaries, ended up practically melting into battlefields, I think those words are most probably true.

...Most probably, one of my ancestors lost themselves in the battlefield so much that they ended up regretting it later. Which is probably why they left those words and went as far as to carve it into the grip of the demon sword”

Elma took the demon sword off with the scabbard and handed it over to Merea. Since Elma's finger was pointed to the handle of the sword, he looked over at it. When he removed the thread wrapped around the handle, he saw that the words that Elma had just spoken were written in old-fashioned letters.

“It's to the point where they carved it into the demon sword which is the very symbol of the battlefield. Most probably, these words were something they wanted all the future warriors to know more than anything else”

“...”

Merea continued to stare at the carving.

He kept staring at it with a serious yet complicated expression.

“—Merea”

Suddenly, Elma looked towards Merea and called out to him.

Merea finally looked towards Elma.

At that moment, their eyes met.

“Do you have a dream outside of the battlefield?”

“—”

He couldn't reply.



Merea knew that he had a desire but, that desire was one that belonged on a battlefield.

In the chain of events that led to it he ended up becoming a demon lord.

At that time he embraced a dream, a dream to save all the demon lords.
To become the hero of the demon lords.

However, that was a dream that was centered around battle.

In reality, he ended up with that sort of a desire simply because he saw those demon lords who ended up in front of him, being chased by various countries and hunted by them.

Though, that was all there was to it.

If he thought thoroughly about it, there was nothing [after] that.

Fight, resist, win—what after that?

He couldn't suddenly come up with something.

What would be the right path, what should he do—winning shouldn't be the end of everything.

Even though he understood that, he couldn't come up with a major vision that would be compliant with the world.

It was as if he suddenly realised that he was given proof that he was not yet able to properly exist in this world.

He suddenly felt his body grow cold.

He felt like he alone was being abandoned by the world.

The backs of the comrades around him felt strangely far away.

They had lived their entire lives in this world.

They knew nothing except for this world.

In other words, they had no choice but to be compliant to this world.

As far as they were concerned, this world was their absolute foundation.

As long as they recognize the world, they could consider their own existence to be certain.

On the contrary, he had knowledge of the [other side] so he could look at this world in an objective view.

In a sense, he could be skeptical of this world's providence.

After tracing the surface, he had the capability to think, "something's not right here" and take a step back.

What everyone thinks to be the truth is something that he alone could doubt.

That thought was somehow terrifying.

Even for the ones who comply with the world, the battlefield was a sort of symbol of the unnatural and unreal, was what he understood from Elma's speech.

Which is probably why she talked about a dream unrelated to the battlefield. In other words, he spoke grandly about a dream based on the certainty of the world.

--I'm clinging onto that battlefield with a lot of difficulty.

The only certain desire that he had recognized was an unreliable dream rooted in the uncertainty of the world.

--It's vague.

Suddenly, he couldn't even tell if he was standing on his own or not.



He felt like he was left alone in the gap between two worlds.



Did he have a dream unrelated to the battlefield that he could rely on?

...He didn't know.



“...I don't know”

“...is that so”

Merea replied honestly.

Elma didn't look troubled or angry, she just gently smiled as she continued to watch Merea.

Elma placed her hand on Merea's face.

It was almost like a mother tenderly being affectionate with her son.

Or maybe even like a gallant woman who was consoling her lover.

“Then, [let's search for it from now on]. It's fine, you'll definitely find it. It hasn't been long since you came out to the outside world right?”

“—yeah”

“There will be tons of new things. While you're watching all of that, you'll definitely find something. If you like, you could even aim to become my husband you know? That's definitely a dream unrelated to the battlefield. My dream would end up being fulfilled as well! Two birds with one stone!”

Elma moved her hand from Merea's face and placed both her hands on her hips before she spoke proudly.

Those were joking words that she spoke to cheer Merea up.

Elma herself had no idea why she said such words but oddly, even though she spoke them unintentionally, she didn't regret it at all.

Merea laughed lightly at Elma's words and spoke.

“Haha, that’s not bad huh. I’ll keep it in mind”

“What the, you called me a beauty didn’t you? Give me an immediate answer, immediate”

“I was warned by various people that things would turn out pretty bad if I married someone just based on their appearance after all”

Merea nostalgically remembered the lessons that the heroic spirits had taught him on that mountain top.

“Ha, fine. Then go ahead and check out my personality as well. —uhh, it suddenly feels like I’m saying some seriously amazing things...”

“Isn’t it fine not to think too deeply about it?”

“Mm, that’s true as well”

Feeling like she might end up blushing profusely once more, Merea said that in a partly joking way.

At that point, from where the other demon lords had gathered,

“Oka~y, let’s all get going now~”

They could hear Shaw’s shout.

“—so he says”

“Ah. In that case, let’s first look for a place that we can sleep with no worries. We first need to find a place where we can live that has nothing to do with a battlefield, otherwise there’s no way we could follow my ancestor’s words. While we’re in the battlefield, if I ask you to look for a dream unrelated to the battlefield then Merea would end up getting troubled by it after all”

Elma flashed a gorgeous smile at Merea and then jumped up and ran towards the other demon lords.

Merea looked at her retreating back with a smile and spoke.

“—That’s true”

He gave a small nod.

“—I’ll definitely find the path to that point”

Merea still didn’t have much of a grasp on a dream unrelated to the battlefield. Unlike the earlier time, it wasn’t like another wish would just pop up. However, just because that was the case, it wasn’t like his dream belonging on a battlefield would just disappear.

Which is why he decided to first complete his current dream.

Although it would be a little vague if he tried to see what had actually changed but even then, Merea felt like the weight on his shoulders had gotten much lighter.

Over and above everything else, he felt like he would be much more desperate to come back alive from the battlefield.

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【ACT 5】

THE EAST SKY DYED SCARLET

Chapter 48

Encounter

The marching speed of the demon lords saw a remarkable increase as soon as Noel joined them.

That was mainly because Noel had taken over the luggage that would otherwise have been on the horses' backs but there was another point that the horses could be praised on.

Even though they were near a land dragon that could be considered a high ranking existence, they did take some distance from him but not once did they try to run away.

Though they had some anxiety about this matter originally but unexpectedly they didn't have to do anything about it.

These definitely were horses that Zaido could be extremely proud of having selected.

“He’s excellent isn’t he?”

The **<Alchemy King>** Shaw had a proud look on his face.

“That’s unexpected, for you to be proud of something other than money”

“People, in themselves, are property as well after all”

Merea was riding on top of Noel alongside the luggage.

At times he would talk to Noel in dragon tongue and had somehow seemed to have gotten used to riding on the dragon’s back as well so he look like the spitting image of a dragoon.

“He’s gotten used to it quite easily hasn’t he?”

“I’d like to say as expected, but he seemed to be feeling a little sick at the beginning though”

“It’s a win simply because he didn’t barf”

In the first place, having fifteen horses marching together was already something that stood out quite a bit but now that they had a land dragon together with them, there were no questions about it.

That said, they understood that quite well when they decided to increase their speed.

Unlike how they had been till then, being careful not to have their destination exposed, they no longer felt any need to be too careful anymore.

Since they had reached this far, it was now only a matter of reaching Lemuse. They had to reach Lemuse before the pursuit from Mūzeg reached them.

“—Well then”

Suddenly, Shaw, who had been having a conversation with Salman towards the rear of the group, straightened his collar and started speaking with a serious expression.

“We somehow managed to get here at a speed much faster than I had ever imagined. Honestly though, if they managed to circle around ahead of us even now then there’s absolutely no way for us to get away from them. Since we even have a land dragon to help us speed things along”

“Yeah, that’s true. If Mūzeg does manage to exceed even a dragon then at that time I’ll give them a grand applause”

Salman let go of his reins and spread both arms.

“By the way, how far is it to Lemuse?”

“If we run at this speed then at the fastest it should be two days. An appropriate time would be three days”

“In that case our rations will last till then huh”

“Yeah. Also our stamina will... well it’ll be fine I think”

Shaw spoke after taking a glance at the other demon lords.

“In that case, let’s end the talk about it going well. The problem is, what should we do

if they do circle around ahead of us”

In all honesty, thinking about that alone should be more than enough. If there's no one circling ahead of them then things would work out.

What they needed to think about was what if Mūzeg was in the way they were proceeding on.

“...do you think that is possible?”

Salman asked with his sandy hair billowing in the wind. He had an extremely serious expression.

“That's right huh... , I'd say about 50% chance of that happening”

Shaw similarly had an extremely serious expression while he replied.

“50% huh. Even though we've done so much and it's still 50% huh”

“Mūzeg is that kind of an existence after all. It's just an example but—”

Shaw removed his right hand from the reins and raised his index finger.

“In case the other side was also using land dragons?”

“Oi oi, there has never been a country that's done something as frightening as that. Even if they were to use it, where would they get those land dragons from?”

“Who knows? Isn't it from around some place?”

“Land dragons roam around in groups you know. If you try to kidnap one of them, the entire army of dragons would chase after you... Ahh, that scene has more impact than a nightmare huh. Just imagining it made me want to cry”

“Hmmm... , in that case, stealthily steal it while it's still an egg?”

“I wonder if the parent would even look away”

“If they intentionally aim at a child dragon and while their attention is diverted to

that—”

“A simple diversion huh... I don’t know. Even then it’s not really that convincing. Well, in any case, no matter the method they would have had to sacrifice a lot of people just to capture one dragon”

“However, if Mūzeg were to decide that it was required then they would easily approve of the sacrifices. That country itself was built on a large number of sacrifices after all”

Salman realised that amongst those sacrifices, even they themselves were included and not to mention their ancestors who couldn’t run away were as well.

“Well, though that was said, if we just look around then there are times when lone land dragons are sold so then it just becomes a matter of whether they have the funds to purchase it or not”

“So you’re basically just going to go with the assumption that they’re using a land dragon huh. —It’s really annoying that it feels like your prediction would turn out to be true”

If it had been a complete fantasy creature that Shaw had mentioned then even Salman wouldn’t have bothered with that conversation.

At the very least, as a [merchant] though he might use his imagination as a joke but in essence he was pretty much realistic.

Since that is the case, then there must be some catch to it.

Even if it’s not clear, then small amounts of information may have piled up and formed into an idea of maybe that might be the case, in Shaw’s head.

That was why Salman felt annoyed and heaved a depressed sigh.

“If that were true then it would be the worst. I seriously can’t keep going on if that happened, I’ll just throw my arms up”

“No, I completely agree”

Shaw laughed.

However, Salman quickly fixed his posture from having done a resignation pose and

once again started speaking in a serious tone.

“If they end up with land dragons in front of us and if that were to happen right before we reach Lemuse...”

Salman had a strong resolution burning in his eyes as he continued.

“We’ll first need to push the ones that can’t fight onto Lemuse”

“—Yeah, that’s true”

After that incident at the sacred mountain, there was one point that gradually came up after seeing everything and having various conversations on the road.

In other words, there were demon lords who were not good at fighting.

The <Devil> Aiz was a prime example.

The ones who inherited such special techniques ended up having the title of demon lord shoved on them right after the era of the great war.

In order to strengthen their foundation in various ways, the countries would also go after individuals who had strength like Shaw with his economical power or Aiz with her espionage capabilities.

They weren’t necessarily good at combat but even then they were still aimed at simply because they possessed certain useful abilities.

As the war between nations evolved and started branching out in various types of warfare, the convenient techniques that these people had, had become ever more sought after.

Also, it was also convenient that they weren’t nearly as strong as the demon lords who opposed the countries during the great war.

Since their power to resist was low, they were easy to capture.

Hence, there were many descendants of demon lords who had been targeted in such a way after the war.

Since Salman knew this, his first priority was to have the ones who couldn’t fight to retreat from the battlefield and somehow push them off onto Lemuse.

“If we’re just at the finish line, then even if I have to throw them over I’ll do that. The one thing I want to avoid no matter what, is having the people who can’t fight standing on the front lines. That’s my obstinacy as the *<First Emperor>* ”

Salman’s determination was strong.

Even Shaw could see that.

Seeing such a Salman, Shaw couldn’t help but think *[Good grief]* with a wry smile on his face.

“Haa. Might it not be about time that you started carrying herbal remedies from your stomach? It seems like you’re somehow worried about every single person around”

“In that case you go get that medicine from your firm”

“If we reach Lemuse safely then, while I’m building the Lemuse branch, I’ll do that for you then”

“Not sure if I should say as expected or what but you’ve already made preparations to set up a branch in Lemuse?”

“That’s obvious isn’t it? Who do you think I am? I’m the money-grubber, Shaw Jules Sherwood you know? It’s an assumption that we’ll be saved and it’s a premise to earn more money”

“I’d rather respect you...”

Salman showed a sarcastic smile to Shaw.

“Anyway, I’m fine. Till some time ago I didn’t really care. I ended up going off in the opposite direction, so to speak... more like, let it be. Talking about me is pointless when you have situations like Merea, Elma or you walking around. It’s not something that particularly needs to be discussed anyway”

“In that case, in time”

“I just told you to let it be”

“I could smell money so that’s why”

“I just felt a serious amount of fear towards your nose”

Salman smiled bitterly.

“In any case, let’s head forward first. That sort of a conversation can take place after we find a satisfactory place to lay our heads”

“—That’s true”

The two stopped their conversation at that point and ensured their horses were running properly.



After one night had passed, in the evening of the next day.

At around that time, the air around the demon lords was tingling violently.

—It was the exposure of their tension.

There was no helping it though.

Two days later they would reach Lemuse but then again, in two days they could also end up encountering Mūzeg once more.

If that were to happen then it would end being a head-on collision.

They couldn’t really expect to get away as easily as they did the time before.

That situation had gone their way simply because they had the initiative as well as the geographical advantage.

If they do end up fighting in an equal scenario, then there was no way to know what would happen.

That was why they were tense.

At the same time, they prayed.

We beg and hope that Mūzeg is not there waiting for us.

Along the way so far, they didn’t even leave a footprint behind—or so they believe.

Even then, if they took up a possibility then, it was rather clear that Müzeg would set up a search line to the east.

They most probably wouldn't think that the demon lords would run to Lemuse that was basically declining but the three kingdoms near it would be candidates to run to.

They may not know the actual destination but they may end up using the power of numbers to set up a gigantic search line that covers even the detour route.

Müzeg has at least enough numbers to set up something as broad as that.

That being said, becoming too pessimistic would be a problem as well.

In the end, unless they saw it with their own eyes, they wouldn't know which one was the truth.

That was why they wished and prayed.

Let the situation develop in the way that we desire, please.



They made it through the second night.

According to Shaw's estimation, at the earliest they should reach Lemuse tomorrow.

The demon lords had stopped speaking to each other much.

They had conflicted thoughts of wishing that they would reach Lemuse without anything happening as well as dreading that they might end up encountering Müzeg on the way there.

A major sense of tension could be felt leaking from the demon lords.



The night of the third day.

According to Shaw's estimation, at the earliest they would reach in two days and at a suitable pace would reach in three days and the latter ended up being on the mark.

Thanks to that, they were more than convinced that something would take place on the next day.

Their tension was reaching the critical point.

They did feel like making the horses run further in their anxiety but they knew that if they didn't let the horses rest properly now then when it came to facing Mūzeg, the horses wouldn't be able to function as they should.

On the contrary, it could even be considered excellent that they were able to rest up properly at the very last moment.

Especially, the few combat oriented demon lords who were used to combat seemed to be on edge and kept leaking bloodthirst all over the place and the other demon lords who weren't particularly good at combat made sure not to upset them and had a resolute expression on their faces.

The relationships between the demon lords had become considerably firm. There was no mistaking that fact.



The morning of the fourth day after Shaw and Salman had made their predictions had come.

If their predictions were correct then by afternoon, they will either see the town of Lemuse or they will end up seeing something else.

Everyone completed their preparations silently and rode on their horses. On that day, Merea was riding on Noel and was considerably further ahead compared to the others, with his white hair billowing in the wind, he was scouting out the area.

Behind him, Elma similarly was on alert scouting the area out.

The demon lords hoped that no enemy would be caught in the exceedingly excellent scouting skills of those two.



The sun was moving towards its very peak for the day. The position was considerably high. It was noon.

While balancing on Noel's back with his foot on the base of Noel's neck, Merea looked around the surroundings.

—It's about time huh.

It had been exactly three days since the day that Shaw and Salman had made their predictions.

If their predictions were true then around this time, something should be visible.

“...”

He strained his eyes.

Although his red eyes reflected a field but there was no city in view.

Not to mention, they couldn't see any people either. Even the peddlers or merchant parties that they saw at times were not visible at that point.

He strained his eyes.

On his right he could see a hill with sparse greenery on it.

That direction is south.

Merea himself hadn't seen it but apparently the southern part of the eastern continent had rich greenery.

He remembered such information but immediately cut off that train of thought.

He strained his eyes.

On his left he could see a wasteland which was dyed brown.

It seemed like they were running in the gap between a wasteland and plains.

He strained his eyes.

—Suddenly he could see sand billowing in the distance.

It was a cloud of dust.

Either it was disturbed by the wind or— [someone had disturbed it].

He strained his eyes even further.

He wondered if something was hidden inside that cloud of dust.

He tried to figure it out.

At that moment, a wind blew from his left to the right and it seemed to have momentarily blown away that cloud of dust.

The cloud of dust cleared up and inside it, he could see something.

〔There is something〕

That cloud of dust was not because of the wind.

Something was rushing over the wasteland and was blowing up a cloud of dust as it ran.

In an instant.

In an instant Merea figured out what that something was.



That figure was something that was very similar to the figure of Noel who he was riding on.



“—There are land dragons (Reirnote)!!”

Merea's shout was something that brought back all their anxiety and not to mention that it also was a shout that brought up a sense of misery in them.

They were able to see the black flags of Mūzeg raised high on the backs of those land dragons.

Chapter 49

That Determination was a Battle Cry

A large sturdy build that towered over its surroundings.

Angular wings that looked more for cutting through wind rather than gather it up.

Although it had a body that was as strong as a huge tree but even then it didn't lose any of its flexibility.

Without a doubt, that being excelled at running fast.

It had a figure that would make anyone who saw it, intuitively think so.

<Land Dragon (Reirnote)>.

A species that was even known as the king of the surface world, a top ranking species in the ecosystem.

Not to mention,

--They're [adults].

Merea thought that inwardly.

The land dragons he could see way into the distance, had bodies that were considerably larger than the black scaled Noel that Merea was currently riding on.

The size aside, the growth of the various body parts were also considerably different.

As soon as Merea concluded that it was an adult, at the same time, he immediately readied himself for battle.

While the other demon lords were still feeling a little dazed and lost, Merea quickly and calmly analyzed the situation.

--Is that it?

The cloud of dust had been blown away momentarily when the wind had blown in but the cloud of dust had quickly risen back up from the feet of the land dragons.

The cloud of dust that looked like mist, immediately wrapped itself around the surroundings of the land dragons.

—No, there are two more.

However, Merea's extensive field of vision and excellent kinetic vision didn't let that tiny amount of information, that he caught in the corner of his eye, go.

There were two other tails that he saw, which were slightly different colours to the land dragon he had just seen.

Though, that alone wasn't enough information to make a proper decision.

—Gather information. Consolidate it and then predict.

The cloud of dust flows from the left to the right because of a breeze and due to that, the size of the cloud of dust was limited.

Based on the size of the land dragon that he had just seen, guessing the size of the other two land dragons, he could apply that and guess the scene that was in front of his eyes.

—It's not possible to hide four bodies in that cloud of dust.

In the event that the wind had been calm, the dust would have been stagnant in the air and it would have covered the dragons, completely hiding them.

However, in this situation, the breeze had ended up becoming helpful to Merea.

There were a total of three. He was sure of it now.

In such a way, Merea first analysed the enemy's forces before turning his head back and looked over at the demon lords.

Just turning his head slightly back, he observed the demon lords behind him.

--Half.

Those were the number of demon lords who managed to get into their battle stance so far.

It was possible that they had their survival instincts flair up as soon as they noticed land dragons come up from the front.

The ones in the back of the group, tried to look over the shoulders of the demon lords riding in the front and while they were wondering what was going, they were probably obstructed by the cloud of dust.

Although he had warned them, the response to his warning seemed to lean towards, [I find that hard to believe].

At times like this, Merea sincerely believed that it was faster to see it than to hear about it.

However, in the next moment--

"__"

It came.

It was the wind.

Once more, there was a wind that blew away the cloud of dust.

For, but an instant, Merea felt happy about the convenient gust of wind but then he quickly swept those thoughts away.

--It's the opposite.

--This is bad.

What was reflected in Merea's sight were three land dragons exactly as he had predicted it.

Though, the moment they came into view, the air around the people behind him seemed to freeze over.

Seeing those three land dragons, the tension of demon lords seemed to have reached

the maximum.

It was quite possible that the reason the land dragons had covered themselves in that cloud of dust was to give a considerably more impactful entrance once they were considerably close.

When the figures of those land dragons entered their sights, even the demon lords who had already entered into their battle stance looked like they were withering away.

Merea was unsure whether he should say something or not.

If it had been a man who was used to leading soldiers, he might have offered words of encouragement and gotten everyone's morale up.

However, for Merea who had never lead any people... such words didn't come out.



While Merea was worried about this matter for a short while, his senses sensed something else.

--Left.

On the left side, Merea could once again see a cloud of dust.

It was a different cloud of dust that was being raised and was getting progressively larger.

On this side, rather than trying to hide their figures, it seemed more that they were raising that cloud of dust simply because they were running at full speed.

Thanks to that, Merea could very easily see what was inside that cloud.

--Black armour...!

It was an [army of cavalry].

With their bodies wrapped in a black light armour, with several flags with Mūzeg's emblem on it, they made a beeline for the demon lords position.

Unlike the three land dragons coming at them from the front, the cavalry was riding

on horses.

Although he felt a cold sweat running down his back at the sheer number of them but, at the same time, after watching them he realised something.

—They have also only just reached here...!

The black armour that was giving out orders at the head.

The slightly slow and dull formation towards the back.

A strange flustered air around them.

Rather than waiting in ambush, it was quite clear that they had only just reached this spot.

In the first place, since the demon lords only had land dragons in front of them, it would seem that the other side lacked a solid defense.

—The land dragons are to hold us back huh.

If he were to guess from the current situation then, they probably sent the fast land dragons ahead to hold us back.

In any case, there was some distance to the cavalry.

If they at least managed to do something about the land dragons in front of them, then they might be able to get away from this place before the cavalry reached them.

“—”

Merea had yet to make a decision.

There were two choices.

Stop for the moment and strike back and once they get an opening, they should run away towards the east.

Keep up the current pace and keep running eastward.

In any case, they had to retreat to the east. In the situation where their retreat was cut off then the whole situation would just lead to death.

—... Strike back? Against that?

However, Merea quickly dropped the first option.

If it was just one then they could probably do something.

However, once he had seen what was behind the first one, he had no choice but to drop that option.

With those many gathered in one place, would he even be able to protect the demon lords backs and sides?

He had to save every last one. That was something that he couldn't skimp out on.

—Hands, eyes, feet. I wonder how many bodies would be needed... There's no other choice than to break through.

Merea made up his mind.

He would be the one who would move the land dragons thrashing around to the east and make sure that the demon lords made it through.

Once they breakthrough to the east and secure a path for retreat, after that they can strike back properly.

An interception while retreating still has the possibility of working out.

For that reason, crushing the land dragons quickly would be helpful but he could think of that later as well.

In any case,

—I'll have you let me pass.

In that case, he just had to wonder if the demon lords could pass through the gap without any issues or without getting caught.

Merea remembered the look on all the demon lords faces from a moment back.

“...”

As expected, this would be the perfect time for him to raise a [battle cry] to raise morale.

While thinking that, he opened his mouth to speak those words of encouragement but,

—My voice won’t tremble will it...?

That sudden thought made his jaw stiffen



Merea had a voice that originated from something known as the <Pleasure King’s (Yurun Yura) Vocal Cords>.

Fascination, charm.

It was a voice that would resonate in people’s hearts.

That was something that Merea himself was quite aware of so he felt that, if possible, he should raise a [battle cry] right around this time.

At the very least, he had an appropriate voice for this situation.

—But, will the words come out smoothly?

In all honesty, he was anxious if he could speak his mind out.

He wasn’t sure if he could make his words to resound in the surroundings.

In the first place, was he supposed to choose words that would give encouragement.

In the event that he does choose the words, would they actually manage to pull out everyone’s fighting spirits?

In but a moment, various thoughts whirled around Merea’s head and caused his

mouth to stay half open.

Noel advanced forward at a constant speed while waiting for Merea to give him orders.

Very steadily, he approached the three land dragons in front of him.

Noel was waiting for his master's words.

Also, without fail, the people who were riding on horses behind him were—

For a second Merea hesitated and then,

“—”

He closed his mouth.



After having thought about various things, Merea decided to not raise a [battle cry].

—If I screw up, it would lead to more unrest.

Merea was quite certain of that vague possibility.

Since it was a possibility that had come up when he thought about his own position.

There was no conceit in those thoughts nor was there vanity.

It was one of the possibilities that came up when he objectively thought about it.

—If I tremble even a little then everyone would lose their composure.

Why was he in such a position in this group?

At first he found it strange but as he spoke to them over a period of time, he kind of started to understand that reason.

Soon, he himself, took up that position as the head.

With his own sense of determination and responsibility.

Which was why, he thought of the possibility that, if he were to mess up the speech then it would lead to everyone being shaken.

Which was why Merea thought,

—Show your thoughts through your actions.

He changed his policy.

He was not used to raising a [battle cry].

On the contrary, he had the determination to cut down the enemies.

He had already experienced it once during the battle on the mountain top of Lindholm Sacred Mountain.

Which is why, he was sure that he wouldn't screw up.

That's why,

—You go out before anyone else.

He will cut down the vanguard.

It doesn't matter if it's a shield.

It doesn't matter if it's a sword.

He will make sure that, between the demon lords and the enemies,

—you stand in between.



So that they can, even a little, feel relaxed.



Merea intentionally decided not to raise a battle cry.

Instead, he determined himself to stand at the very forefront, further ahead than any of the other demon lords and bear the brunt of the attack.

Most probably he decided that, that was the most appropriate course of action.

—We'll breakthrough.

“—Let's go!!”

Suddenly Merea yelled.

It was an order.

The ones who were at the receiving end of that order, were the demon lords.

The ones who that order was meant for, the demon lords, immediately understood the meaning of that order.

Those short words were not enough to be called a battle cry but they were also not easy going enough to make people feel relaxed.

“—!”

To the demon lords, those words alone acted like encouragement.

They realized immediately as to why Merea chose those words and they saw the actions he took in the next instant.

Having spent so much time with Merea, they naturally arrived at that answer.

Which is why, in the next instant, they managed to change their tension to determination and they could rouse their fighting spirits.

At the moment that they realized what Merea's intentions were,

“Technique deployment—”

While on Noel's back, Merea clapped his hands together causing the sound to reverberate through the surroundings.

As if to take the three land dragons on the other side by surprise, white lightning danced through the air.

Chapter 50

Protection of White Lightning, Guidance of the Devil

“To the right!! Go further to the south!! Avoid the land dragons!!”

From behind Merea, the *< Sword Empress >* Elma yelled out

She looked like she wanted to say that the other demon lords should listen to every single one of her words.

Elma had understood the meaning behind Merea’s words faster than anyone else and,

—Sorry.

She *[(took responsibility)]*.



Actually, she wanted to go together with Merea.

However, she understood why Merea said those words and why he took those actions so she hesitated to follow him after understanding all that.

—You plan on throwing yourself at the land dragons don’t you?

He plans to do something about that annoying wall that the land dragons have made all by himself.

Whether they beat them or stay back.

In either case, until they can secure their passage to the east, Merea would keep undertaking that role.

In the event that the land dragons managed to hold them back and Mūzeg’s cavalry

caught up to them then it would be game over.

That was why she could accept Merea's choice as the right one.

"Don't go too far!! It'll end up as a detour instead"

However, one anxiety remained.

--Just one person, but one person.

It was in the fact that they had Merea jump into a situation with dangerous enemies, all alone.

Elma felt a different kind of responsibility compared to Merea.

That she had involved the other demon lords into a situation where they were chased by Mūzeg.

It was that kind of a self-reproachful thought.

The thought that had been running rampant in her mind all throughout the trip had been that very thought.

Which was why she would have been happy being the shield for everyone.

However, now.

Even though he should have also just been rolled up in the situation but he was currently trying to bear a weight that was much more than she herself felt.

That ended up leaving a lump of negativity in Elma's heart.

"Gather up! People who have confidence in their strength stand on the outside!"

--But, you probably don't want me to go together with you do you?

On one hand, she thought that as well.

If Merea had decided that then it was their jobs, having put him up in the position of [Master], to approve of it.

--I understand. I definitely understand.

In the gap between the two thoughts, she made a decision.



—Then I will respond to your thoughts first.



Elma took Merea's thoughts and matched with them.

She ditched her own stubbornness, didn't bother with any lip service and while apologizing to Merea in her mind, she spoke again.

“—Don't turn around!! Run right through!!”

She changed her way of thinking things.

Merea will stop the three land dragons.

If it were Merea then he would definitely be able to safely regroup with them later.

In which case, she should answer Merea's wish and lead everyone else through.

Now was the time to believe in her master.

“—Let's go!!”

Elma once again raised her demon sword to the sky.



The demon lords group accelerated quickly in order to run through.

As if to let loose all the energy they had been accumulating so far, the demon lords as well as the horses roused themselves up.

Elma who was running at the forefront, didn't even blink twice at the cloud of dust and had her entire attention on Mūzeg's cavalry.

Although they seemed to be quite far but, as if they had realized that the demon lords

had started to head to the south, the cavalry started to move around in a big arc to close them in.

“Their decisions are quite quick huh...!”

While her horse’s hooves were making a loud noise while running on the ground, she quietly cursed.

They were definitely veterans.

Even though they were covered in a dust cloud and they shouldn’t be able to see the actions that the demon lords were taking but they still seemed to be able to sense their intentions.

After seeing all that, Elma couldn’t even doubt whether the cavalry was comprised of elites or not.

“!! Oi!! They’re trying to do something!!”

Elma heard Salman yelling from behind her.

Although she didn’t have the leeway to turn around but as soon as she heard those words she once again concentrated her attention on Mūzeg’s cavalry.

Mūzeg’s cavalry had broken up into [two rows].

The speed of their formation change was quite amazing.

She unconsciously admired the level of refinement that their change in formation had even though they were riding on horses.

However, that wasn’t the problem right now.

The point that she had to concentrate on was their intention.

“!!”

In the next moment, Elma noticed something in the vicinity of the cavalry corps that had broken away.

More accurately, she noticed a very obvious change in the route of the cavalry.

—〔A technique formation〕…!

They were planning on using some kind of magic.

Elma immediately felt herself grip her demon sword even stronger.

Was it an attack or was it some other magic?

The answer to that was immediately obvious.

The horses of the cavalry corps that had broken away steadily ran through the technique formation that had appeared in midair.

In the next instant, the horses accelerated at a strange speed.

That wasn't an attack.

That was,

—an 〔Acceleration Technique〕.

This is bad.

Our expectations... are off.

It was a speed that they didn't expect.

One portion of the cavalry that continued to chase after them at the same speed as they did till now.

Another portion of the cavalry that took a wide detour in order to ruin their retreat plans by accelerating.

While closing down our escape route,

—They plan to do a pincer attack...!

Although the acceleration wasn't something that they could keep up for very long but that alone served to screw up the estimation that the demon lords had come up with.

There was a possibility that they might catch up.

It's possible that they might get crushed if they did something wrong.

Any further detours would end up pushing them further away from Lemuse and had absolutely no meaning.

They were already proceeding along the route that could be considered the best possible route.

Elma hesitated.

Although they had taken a basic battle formation, if they actually fought properly then the group might just crumble.

The other side had split their forces in order to close in on the demon lords from both sides but that instead made their forces thin on both sides giving them a chance to break through but,

—I really can't see it...!

It was quite dangerous.

In the confusion of the frontlines, to find the weak link in the enemy's formation and attack there to breakthrough is something that a person with normal eyesight would never be able to achieve.

If she had a natural intuition or a strategic eye that deviated from the ordinary then it might have been possible but unfortunately, she had neither.

—What should I do?

How should I get away from the enemies?

What route should I take?

If we stop our feet, we'll play right into their hands.

—I understand that.

However, even if they ride right into them now, would they really be able to breakthrough.

Elma's impatience reached its boiling point and she unconsciously cursed out loud.

“Damn it! I've never felt more jealous of a bird's sight before...!”

If she could have a bird's eye view of the situation then she might be able to do something about the current situation.

The moment she said that, she suddenly gasped.

Elma had impulsively come up with a [reply] to her own words.

—Bird's eye view...!!

She realised it.

As soon as she realised it, she was about to turn around.

However, before she could turn around, a voice reached Elma's ears from behind her.



“I'll, be your eyes...!”



She felt a warmth coming from her back.

She remembered well that voice that came from the young girl.

More than anything, it was the voice that she wanted to hear.

“—Aiz!”

“I got on!”

The <Devil> Aiz.

The one who was probably the thinnest in the group and the weakest member, the girl with silver eyes.

“Did you just jump from one horse to another in this kind of a situation!?”

On top of a horse. In the state where they were riding at full speed.

“Marisa-san helped out a little...!”

Suddenly, a thin arm wrapped around Elma's stomach from behind her, seeing that Elma unintentionally laughed.

This was without a doubt Aiz's arm.

She had actually managed to jump from one horse to another in the middle of this situation where the horses were running at full speed.

"Hahaha! You might just be most daring person in this group!"

In the middle of sounds of the horses pounding on the ground with their hooves, Elma couldn't help but raise such a shout.

--If she had failed, she might even have died!

No, if she had fallen, then she would have been stepped on by the other demon lord's horses and without a doubt she would have died.

Even though she knew that, she still jumped over from Marisa's horse over to hers.

In order to let Elma know the path they should take with her <Magic Eyes of the Devil>.

Marisa who followed up such an Aiz probably had a stiff expression on her face.

The self-proclaimed maid who devoted too much of herself to Merea and Aiz probably felt like a mother making her beloved child walk along a cliff while watching Aiz jump over.

Not to mention, Aiz who was oddly stubborn at times wouldn't have pulled back even if she was told to.

In the end, Marisa was probably forced to help her out.

Elma once again imagined that ice beauty's cold expression being coloured with a very human-like impatience and couldn't help lightly laughing again.

She then quickly turned her attention back to the current situation.

"【Can you see it】?"

"Yeah....!"

She had already started using her <Magic Eyes of the Devil>.

As soon as she confirmed that, she spoke up to give Aiz more confidence and help her in her decisions.

“It’s fine if it’s subjective! If Aiz feels that we can get through then grab onto my stomach with your full force! If you feel we can’t do it then tightly pinch my sides to let me know!”

“W, with my full force...!”

“It’s fine! My abs aren’t weak enough to hurt just from your grabbing onto them!”

In order to help Aiz not feel scared, Elma said those things lightly and waited for Aiz’s judgement.

The time she was waiting for Aiz’s reply felt unnecessarily long.

Although it might have been a short moment but seeing Mūzeg’s cavalry gradually get closer made her unable to feel anything else.

At that moment, Elma noticed something.

The figures of the adult land dragons that had been flitting in the corner of her eyes were... no longer there.

With mixed feelings of impatience and relief, she impulsively kept looking around. She was trying to find the figures of the land dragons.

--There they are.

As she looked around, she noticed the three land dragons who were wrapped in a [strange white flash] and were hesitating.

The moment she noticed that, she couldn’t help but feel a deep admiration.

--You really are an amazing guy huh... , Merea.

Even that single moment was enough to understand the situation.

The white light became a line as it shot out at unbelievable speeds and wrapped around the three land dragons, binding them in place.

That white light was lightning.

Just extremely fast.

With a strange wind wrapped around it that made it look like wings.

It flew straight and struck the land dragons straight in the face... a white lightning.

It reacted immediately to any movement from the land dragons and would strike them on their nose as if trying to crush it.

The insane stubbornness of the land dragons coupled with the fact that there was not even a slight gap to allow them to dodge the blows lead to them not even being able to get a single decisive blow in.

If they were to take their eyes off the land dragons for even a moment, they would end up reaching them in the blink of an eye.

So, this method was probably to avoid that from happening which is why he chose attacks that prioritised speed.

The very fact that he was able to subdue those land dragons all alone was already a situation where no one could ever criticize him.

The moment after she confirmed Merea's figure... the arms that Aiz had wrapped around her stomach squeezed tightly.

—... Got it.

She confirmed Aiz's answer.

In that case, the responsibility of leading the other demon lords was,

—In the name of the <Sword Emperor>.

“Alright, we'll breakthrough the weak link in the enemy's formation. —Don't worry! I'll definitely protect you! That's why, you guide us!”

“Okay!”

When she confirmed that Aiz had leaned further into her own body, Elma made up her mind.

At that point it was already possible to estimate exactly where they would intersect with Mūzeg's cavalry.

—We're going to collide.

However,

—I won't hesitate anymore.

The demon sword felt like it was crying out for blood.

Chapter 51

Upheaval

—It's hard.

Merea was moving around the land dragons at an intense speed and while restraining their movements with attacks, he realized just how hard their scales actually were.

—If I don't hit them extremely hard, it has no effect.

The land dragons had their attention on Elma and the other demon lords who were running off to the east and in the end their movements seemed rather uncertain.

It was hard to tell whether the ones who were feeling confused were the land dragons or the dragoons on their backs.

(TLN: So they're basically dragon riding cavalry and since I didn't want to call them that, I went with dragoons which are essentially mounted cavalry in real life plus that sounds much cooler)

In any case, that reaction made Merea feel partly happy and partly dissatisfied.

—Look this way.

Of course, if it were possible he wanted to bring the land dragons down immediately.

However, if he showed even a small opening, then they might use two of the dragons as decoys and immediately go after Elma and the other demon lords. So he's not able to find the chance to take down all three at the same time.

He couldn't afford to let even a single one of them get away.

—Look, over here!!

At that time, Merea was waiting for a particular opportunity. He had some expectations.

When the attention of all three dragons was on Merea he would then be able to change over to an all out attack.

The moment when they give up on chasing after the other demon lords long enough to beat down the irritating fly flitting around their surroundings.

The idea of using the others as a decoy would completely vanish from their minds in that kind of a situation.

In the mere moments that they stop thinking such thoughts,
—I'll beat them down.

“He's such an irritating guy!!”

The voice of one of the dragoons reached Merea's ears.

Although the voice was slightly distorted because the dragoon was wearing a full face helm but when he calmly listened to it, there was a clear note of irritation in that speech.

—Just a little more.

While being as irritating as possible to the utmost limit, Merea waited for the right moment.

—Come on.

A moment after he had attacked multiple times. The dragon right next to the one he had last attacked, turned its eyes towards Merea.

They no longer had their sights on the other demon lords.

—It's finally here.

A loud roar resounded in Merea's ears.

It was a strange speed and pressure that felt like it would split apart the wind and even the space they were in. In the next instant, a reddish black log like object came flying at him.

It was the land dragon's tail.

Merea himself was in mid-air.

“Buzzing around here and there since a while back...! —If you really want to die that much then I’ll let you die first!!”

The dragoon who was riding on the dragon to the right seemed to finally have his emotions take over his consciousness.

When the land dragon heard those words, its tail immediately attacked Merea and reached a few meters away from him.

—Dodge it.

Merea moved once more.

Rather than beating his wings it felt more like he had a gust of wind push him downwards.

They were movements with different intentions.

Overhead, the land dragon’s tail swung past as if it were the death god’s scythe.

However, Merea didn’t bother about that and instead he moved around looking at the other two dragons and then he noticed it.

—Right there.

He was convinced.

Merea did not miss the fact that the dragoons would strike the backs of the dragons in specific ways.

In the next moment, as he had thought, all three dragons turned their attention towards Merea.

Merea had been waiting for that very moment.

He moved without any hesitation.

With the earlier flow, he dived and with his wings made of wind he finely adjusted his landing point even further.

Unlike how he was moving earlier, like a fly flitting around without calming down, he moved straight towards one of the land dragon’s feet.

At the same time,

“Technique expansion——”

Merea showed a strange stance.
——Left flank stance.

It was as if he had a sheath attached to his left side from which he was drawing a sword out.

Although he wasn't carrying any weapons but the people watching could help but visualise a sheath hanging on Merea's left hip.

Merea momentarily stopped his movements while still in the stance of holding onto the hilt of the sword on his waist.

The wings of wind disappeared from his back and the white lightning disappeared as well.

However, in the next moment,

“ <The Resplendent Sword of the Water God (Seura Euras)> ”

Another change occurred.

Inside the right hand which was placed near his left hip, a beautiful sword which glittered blue materialised.

The blade that was modeled like a sharp blade was roughly three times Merea's height and from within the blade you could see bubbles that emitted a beautiful light.
A water sword that emitted a pale blue light.

That blade, in the next instant,

“The First Strike——”

It felt like time itself was cut with that one strike.

It was a movement similar to Iai.

The blue light was dancing around the surroundings and the afterimage told the trajectory of the slash.

That blue penetrated the leg of the land dragon and,

“—”

A shriek could be heard far and wide.

One leg of the land dragon was cleaved off leaving an extremely smooth stump in its wake.

The humongous body, after losing one of its legs, lost its balance and tilted to one side.

However, Merea's movements didn't stop even then.

Before the dragon's body could fall to the ground, he had already started running at full speed towards the next dragon.

The dragoons couldn't even understand what was going on anymore.

However, the second land dragon that Merea was heading towards seemed to understand that its brethren had somehow been wounded and the enemy who had wounded its brethren was heading its way.

That is our natural enemy.

With an animalistic instinct, the land dragon seemed to think that about Merea.



While running, Merea recreated the water blade that disappeared after the previous attack.

At that time, he noticed that the land dragon he was aiming at was waving its right arm and tail around as if to stop Merea from reaching its bosom.

It wanted to mow him down.

Merea dodged it with a paper thin difference in such a way that it could even be described as graceful and in the next instant,

“The Second Strike—”

He swung the blade.

Merea immediately heard the dragon's shriek.

That sound seemed to have a mixture of pain and anger mixed in but Merea moved on without caring about that.

The third dragon was still remaining.

When Merea turned his gaze towards the third dragon, he noticed that both the land dragon and the dragoon seemed to somehow understand the situation and the dragon had turned away from Merea and turned towards the other demon lords and was about to rush towards them.

Both when Merea rushed out and the land dragon taking a stance to jump out was at the same time.

—Like I'll let you get away...!!

Merea realized that he would never be able to catch up to the dragon with his normal speed.

As soon as he realized that, he cancelled the water blade that he had been forming and changed the technique he was using.

He clapped his hands.

Those were not movements just for show, the moment he did that, white lightning sprung up and when he had clapped a second time, wings of wind grew on his back.

Merea chose the techniques which were the fastest in all the ones that he knew and used those on himself.



In but a moment, Merea had bisected the legs of two dragons and completely stopped their movements.

The scales that are said to be near impossible for normal to even damage were cleanly cut through as if they were butter, by Merea's two slashes.

Even if it was something that would only come up as a joke, even though he managed to accomplish something like that, Merea wasn't satisfied.

However, the flow of the events clearly showed some of Merea's weaknesses.

If someone with good intuition had seen that situation then they probably would have felt a strange discomfort in Merea's actions.

If they had noticed the situation for what it was then they would be right in thinking, [there's nothing that can be done about him anymore] but according to a [certain man] that was not the case.

That man was currently in a place that was far away from the current battlefield. At a place that was at least several tens of minutes away by a fast horse.

Even then, that man was definitely nearing the battlefield.

As if he was being attracted by the smell of the battlefield, travelling at breakneck speeds.

—He was not yet visible.



While clinging onto Elma's back, Aiz had completely moved her [normal vision] outside of her own consciousness.

What entered Aiz's brain was a bird's eye view of the terrain that she was able to view because of the [Devil's Vision].

“Right...!”

“What next?!”

“Immediately go diagonally left! Cut your way, through!”

That place was like hell.

The surroundings were filled with nothing but enemies. They had already collided with the enemies.

If Aiz had looked at her surroundings with her normal vision then she may have stiffened up completely.

That was how close the horses were running past the enemies.

The demon lords had the upper hand after the collision.

Mūzeg's cavalry corps that had prioritised speed over everything else by even using

an acceleration technique, ended up with some confusion in their ranks.

Even then, Mūzeg still lived up to its name as a superpower and as if they already expected the demon lords to try to go around, they ignored the slight confusion in their ranks and attacked immediately with a large amount of bloodthirst.

The demon lords intercepted that.

There were demon lords who specialized in techniques and they created a wall and pushed the advancing cavalry back.

Even though the enemies were many times in number more than themselves, the demon lords still did not budge.

Although they weren't a unified practitioners corps but the demon lords all had extremely high abilities and they created a wall that at least managed to block the first charge.

No matter how many times they blocked them, there were more waves of people attacking persistently but the demon lords were definitely moving forward.

In that place, the part that was most in danger was the vanguard.

In other words, it was the position that Elma was in.

Although it couldn't be called a battle but there were definitely Mūzeg's cavalrymen who kept slipping through the cracks and attacking her.

If the cavalry manages to get in front of them then the demon lords have no choice but to [cut their way through].

The one who had to take up that role weren't the demon lords on the sides who were putting up walls but instead the one who was the vanguard, in other words, Elma.

“—!!”

As Aiz watched the vanguard with the devil's vision, she couldn't help but think,

—Amazing.

She couldn't help but feel astonished.

The awesome part was the <Sword Emperor> Elma's combat capabilities while on a

horse.

She swung the demon sword Krishra with a tremendous speed and very precisely cut only the soldiers that needed to be cut.

Even though the opponents had a long weapon in their hands but she didn't even bother with that and still cut her way through.

With a pressure that felt like she would even cut through the very space itself, she kept swinging the demon sword and even the spears that would come stabbing at her would have their blades shattered.

Not to mention, she even managed to make sure nothing happened to Aiz as well.

“If you don't want to become the rust on my demon sword then get out of the way!!”

Elma raised a battle cry like some kind of a war god.

It was a voice filled with coercion and encouragement.

Elma could hear the loud voices of Salman or the other demon lords from behind herself.

“Just a little more...!”

Aiz confirmed that the other demon lords were still safe with the bird's eye view of the devil.

Salman was leaning his body slightly away from the horse and was hitting Mūzeg's cavalry with fist wrapped in strange purple particles.

Marisa used acrobatic movements to slip her dagger into the gaps in the armour of Mūzeg's cavalry.

Although she already knew that those two had abnormal power but now that she had actually seen it in action, she couldn't help but find it breathtaking.

Although plain but another factor that really contributed to the situation were the horses.

While they were swift horses, they were once [war horses] as well.

They did get scared when they were faced with the land dragons but it was to their

credit that even in that situation they did not run away. This just went to show that they weren't timid when it came to war.

On the contrary, they attacked the horses of Mūzeg's cavalry with their own bodies.

As if to show that they themselves were really strong, they showed a different, slightly wild way of showing off their strength as compared to the humans who were riding on their backs.

Of course, there were horses who were wounded.

However, they still did not fall.

If the horses fall, then the demon lords would die.

As if they understood that, the horses had an odd dreadful air wrapped around them that could almost be seen with the naked eye and were trying to breakthrough the enemy's army.

“Just a little bit more...!”

While ordering Elma on the path to take, Aiz watched the enemy and predicted their movements.

If they had just 10 more seconds then they would be able to make it through. That's what she thought.

However, in the single moment that she wasn't paying attention, as if to aim at that gap the demon lords faced a tragedy.

As the side effect of using the magic eyes of the devil affected her, due to the sense of fatigue that her eyes felt, she unconsciously blinked her eyes.

Not having blinked even once till that point was nothing but Aiz's strong determination and willpower but as expected even her body needed her to blink at least once.

Of course, her blinking was not the direct cause of the tragedy.

However, when she used the devil's vision once more after blinking, the tragedy spread in front of her eyes.

“Eh—?!”

What was reflected in her vision was a certain figure that was separated from their group, standing in a place surrounded by Mūzeg's soldiers was... Salman.

In the next instant, screams resounded from the back.

“Wait! Saru!” “Onii-chan!!”

They were the screams of the twins.

Aiz finally realized it at that time.

The twins were riding on the horse but Salman was not.

While riding on a particularly large horse, the twins who had been holding onto Salman's back while attacking the cavalry with their techniques, were still riding on the horse but Salman himself was no longer there.

Most probably, he got down intentionally.

If he had suddenly fallen off the horse then the twins would have fallen together with him.

However, the horse that the twins were riding on didn't have many wounds and the twins themselves had no wounds.

Most probably, that was,

—The same as Merea...!

He used himself as—bait.



“—I've done it now. Something that's not even like me...”

Salman was surrounded by Mūzeg's soldiers.

With the purple particles still flowing out of both his fists, he tried his best to look like he had a lot of leeway but as expected, even Salman didn't think that he could get out of the current situation alone.

With a lot of difficulty, thanks to his bluff like menacing attitude, he had escaped from the soldier's spears so far.

Though the man himself found it rather strange that he was able to keep Mūzeg's soldiers in check with just this level of menacing attitude.

"Ahh... , is it that, ——they want my [magic fists] ? Well, it's definitely difficult to use it when the demon lord has a weapon that is part of their body. Mūzeg probably wants to take it away from me but don't know how to do it properly"

He wasn't sure if that was the real reason.

Though when he tried saying it out loud, he could feel a sense of tension run through those soldiers.

That might unexpectedly have been the right answer.

"Ahh, I'll give you some advice. If you don't handle it properly, the magic fists will lose their power"

Salman's life was now like a flame in the wind.

However, he decided to bluff in such a way and somehow bide his time.

At the very least, as so many of the soldiers had come to his side, the other side should be able to get through quite easily.

—Even if I'm going to die, I'll struggle till the very end.

Such a determination came gushing out of Salman's body.

“—If you want my magic fists then you should get someone who's compatible with them first”

Salman said with a sarcastic smile and shrugged his shoulders.

“Ha, if it doesn’t have power then that’s fine too, I don’t really care. It’s better than letting you get away”

While saying that, a man with a dignified appearance walked out.

The slightly distorted voice that came out of the black helm seemed to have a distinct note of ridicule in it.

However, that black armoured cavalryman pointed his spear at Salman and had a stance that did not show a single opening.

Even if he was mocking Salman, he didn’t seem to underestimate him.

While gauging the power of the man in front of him, Salman heaved a sigh.

“Is that so. ——If that’s the case then the term [hunting] really does suit you people. People like the three kingdoms who come over with their heads bowed saying, [Please lend us your strength] are still much better”

“While doing all that, they still led the demon lords to die. ——It’s no different, as long as you have them die they’re all the same”

“Nope, that’s wrong. If you only look at the result then it’s the same but when it comes to us [demon lords], the process itself makes a big difference. You guys on [that side] may not get it though”

With a fed up look, Salman shrugged his shoulders and while speaking, he realised that his own feelings were boiling up quite a bit.

As if being pushed out by those rumbling feelings, his words continued.

“Don’t think that you can justify anything and everything with just the result and rationality”

“Haa, I don’t get it, you people’s feelings that is. ——There’s no need for me to understand either. Simply because there’s no way this relationship would change”

“That’s just arrogance. There’s nothing that will never change”

Then in that case, I'll show you that it can be changed—is something that he wanted to say.

However, he couldn't say it.

Maybe because, he would probably die here.

Such a thought ended up stopping his words.

“...Haa, if it was in the past then something like this probably would never have happened. It's become strangely round now... That's right, in that case—”

Salman suddenly had the figure of a man flash through his mind.

The words that he couldn't say, that wish—something that he may actually be able to fulfill, the figure of such a man.

—A request from him till the very end huh... haha, sorry Merea. The load on your shoulders is probably going to get heavier.

However, as his last stubborn wish, he wanted to leave those words for the world. Since he couldn't say that he himself would change things.

“It might not be... bad to have things changed by our lord”

As he said that Salman looked towards the sky.

With so many of them in his surroundings, he couldn't even see Merea to find out how he was doing.

He couldn't see Elma and the other demon lords and of course, he couldn't see the twins.

Then at least he didn't want to look at the hateful soldiers of Mūzeg which is why he looked at the sky.

“Well then, die already. If his highness Serius had come on time then I wouldn't have minded letting you live but it doesn't seem like he'll be coming here anytime soon”

“What's with that, why don't you just wait a little longer. If you wait for even a minute longer, he'll reach”

“That's enough of you stalling, demon lord”

“Don't you dare call me that. Being called that by [you people] seriously pisses me off.

The only ones allowed to call me that are other demon lords!!!"

Salman spoke in an extremely enraged tone.

That was a battle cry from one who was already prepared to die.

Salman took a few steps ahead.

He walked over in front of the many spears, by himself---

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Chapter 52

A Rarity in This World, A Demon Lord's...

Elma heard the twins' shouts.

She almost impulsively wanted to turn her horse around.

However, she wasn't able to do it.

If she did, then it would basically mean putting Salman's efforts to waste.

It would make everything he did useless.

“!! —Ahhhhh!!”

At some point, their group had made it most of the way out of Mūzeg cavalry's siege.

However, that scream was a mixture of irritation and sorrow.

It wasn't a yell stemming from happiness at breaking through the siege.

“Someone!!”

Anyone is fine.

“Save him!!”

There was no one who would stretch a hand out to a demon lord.

This world was just that cruel.

She already knew that.

Even then,

“Even a single person is fine...!”

While the horse ran forward, as she cut down the last of Mūzeg's cavalry,

“Is... no one there...!!”

They finally broke through.

In the next moment,



“There is. I’ll show you that I can save him. That’s why, you guys save his highness”



It was in the moment that she raised her face.

Elma saw several men to one side moving in the opposite direction as them.

“—”

Elma’s voice refused to come out.

The other demon lords looked the same as well.

The path that they had just taken, several dozen cavalry were retracing that path and charged into Mūzeg’s army.

Elma continued to chew through the words that they left while passing by the demon lords and with an expression of utter amazement, she looked back at the battlefield.

There was an amazing battle cry that could be heard.

“—”

She still couldn’t speak.

She still couldn’t grasp what was going on.



“Corporal! There are new enemies!!”

The moment after Salman grandly waved his arm around, one of Mūzeg’s soldiers yelled.

“What?!”

In the next moment, another voice was raised.

That's close.

While Mūzeg's soldiers continued to point their spears at him, their attention was completely concentrated to their rear.

“Coming!!”

Salman joined in with Mūzeg's cavalry to see exactly what was going on, on the other side.

Since he was just a step away from dying, he wouldn't be surprised no matter what happened.

He was even impressed at himself for being able to wait for such a strange event with such a refreshing mood.

As if not at all aware of Salman's hesitation, the strangeness came closer with a loud yell.

“Get out of the wayyyyyy!!”

It was a man's deep voice.

The ones who showed up with that voice were several cavalrymen.

They weren't Mūzeg's cavalry.

Those men could easily be called veteran warriors, with their bodies wrapped in a rustic armour, they looked like they could even take an ogre on.

“Oi oi oi oi”

Salman no longer had any idea what was going on.

Even then, he could guess immediately that they were probably people who would be his saviours so he couldn't help but float an exalted smile.

In the next moment, he met eyes with one of the soldiers who had cut their way through.

He looked like an elderly man.

However, his spirit wasn't of someone who had just stepped into old age.

“We'll cut open a path!! Run, young'un!!”

“Ha! I don't really get what's going on but... I can't say anything other than okay in this situation!!”

“That's fine!! If you don't go, then we can't go either after all!”

“Got it! Then I'll come along properly! I'll take you up on your words and go on ahead!!”

As he was told, Salman ran off.

At the same time, Mūzeg's spears came attacking him as he ran.

Although they had been confused with the situation that had just happened but when Salman started moving, they reflexively attacked him.

However, Salman deflected them with his fist and continued on forward.

He ignored any wounds other than those that might become fatal.

A spear stabbed into his body.

Even then he continued to run.

When he looked around, at the spot where the elderly man had charged through, there was a small opening.

A small gap that had been created in between Mūzeg's soldiers.

At that gap, as if to keep it open, cavalrymen who looked like the comrades of the elderly man were in battle.

They were completely overwhelmed when it came to numbers.

However, those cavalry managed to keep a small gap, just large enough for Salman to slip his body through, open for him.

While even using the horses' bodies as shields, as if they were desperately trying to open up a path.

Salman innocently run through.

Even though he had prepared himself to die, the [possibility to live] was strangely

appealing.

That possibility became an eager desire.

He no longer felt the need for logic or rationality and while leaving everything to his instincts, he just ran.

Then... he made it through.



He could see Elma and the others.

As soon as he made it through, a horse showed up in front of him. The twins were riding on it.

They were both holding onto the reins of the horse and were somehow moving around albeit shoddily.

“Saru!!” “Onii-chan!!”

“Haha, at least call me the same thing you damn brats!”

While joking around like that, Salman quickly mounted the horse and looked over at Elma and the others who were considerably far away.

He took the reins from the twins and with them securely in front of him, he kicked the horse's belly.

He could hear the voices of Mūzeg's soldiers from behind.

“Don't come here!” “You idiot!”

The twins seemed to have used their techniques and dropped them to the ground.

That was why Salman concentrated in front him.

He had to first make it to the place where the rest of them were and reform their ranks.

With this, their retreat route to Lemuse had been secured.

Although they were still being chased by an overwhelming force but, it could at least be said that they had crossed the minimum mark for survival.

After that, they just had to wait for Merea and Noel to reach them and then they could come up with other plans.

If it's Merea then he could probably make it past Mūzeg's cavalry alone. Especially since he had the stupidly powerful abilities of white lightning and the wings of wind.

Since he knew that, it was the only reason why he let him go out alone.

When he finally reached the other demon lords, he noticed that Noel had also just reached.

Noel had taken a detour and had gone around to reach this location.

He had probably attracted the attention of the cavalry at Merea's orders.

He had a few injuries here and there but he was, without a doubt, fine.

After that, he finally turned his attention towards the elderly man and his retinue. They were the ones who had saved him, his saviours.

A rarity in this world, a demon lord's—Hero.

“Ahh, old man, you guys—”

Salman started speaking as he turned around.

“—”

Those men... were not there.



Around the time when Salman had miraculously made it past Mūzeg's encirclement and made it to the place where Elma and the others were, Merea was on the back of a land dragon.

On the back of the land dragon that had started running at full speed towards the

demon lords right after Merea had chopped off the other two land dragon's legs.

Before the dragon managed to reach its top speed, he somehow caught up with it and while putting up with the shaking, he got onto its back in one go.

Over and above that, in that one movement, he kicked the dragoon off the dragon's back and immediately moved towards the dragon's head.

“You really haven't been disciplined well...!”

Even though the dragoon had fallen off, the dragon still did not stop.

On the contrary, noticing that Merea was on its back, it started rampaging as if it had gone crazy.

He quickly spoke in dragon tongue but it didn't seem like he was heard at all.

“Calm down...!”

Seeing that it hadn't stopped running at full speed even though the dragoon had fallen off, it seemed like the last order that it was given still remained in its mind.

He had no idea how it had been trained to this extent to be used by Mūzeg's soldiers but he felt like he saw the characteristics of the land dragon in that unbending faithfulness.

While he fixed his posture on the shaking back of the land dragon, Merea turned his gaze to the place where the land dragon was heading and confirmed that his comrades were there.

—They... made it through huh.

He could see the figures of his comrades having made it past Mūzeg's cavalry.

When he saw that scene, he couldn't help but feel relieved.

However, if the land dragon under him reached them then it would end up in a horrible situation.

—I won't let you do that.

Using large techniques in quick succession puts quite a load on the body and tires it out quite a bit but seeing his comrades safe and sound ended up filling him with even more energy.

—I can still move.

“Technique expansion...!”

<Resplendent Sword of the Water God (Seura Euras)> could be seen being formed in his right hand.

“—Forgive me... No—Hate me as much as you can”

While whispering that, Merea aimed the water sword at the base of the dragon's neck and swung it down.



Merea finally ensured that none of the three land dragons could participate in the battles.

Those were results that could be considered amazing by anyone's standards.

However, the battle was still not over.

He couldn't be satisfied with just his current actions alone.

Merea quickly jumped high off the land dragon's body that fell forward and fell apart with creepy movements.

His field of vision widened in one go.

Since the land dragon had been heading towards the demon lords, their position was quite close by.

If he used the <Six Wings of the Wind God (Van Ester)> then he would be able to catch up to them immediately.

After he confirmed that, Merea observed the rest of the surroundings.

He decided to check up on the enemies while he was still in the air.

—Mūzeg.

The flag with the black emblem seemed to have a rather strong presence.

However such a Mūzeg had let the demon lords break through and hadn't even

pursued.

Their plan had ended in failure.

The demon lords had managed to secure a path for retreat.

Although the situation where they're chased by such a large group hasn't changed much but it's a hundred times better than being surrounded by them.

Most probably to prepare to chase after them again, Müzeg's cavalry seemed to stop chasing and were reforming their ranks.

When he looked at those cavalrymen from high up while they didn't move, he was a little overwhelmed by their numbers.

—It doesn't quite reach a thousand... No, but, just the ones who've noticed our presence are this many huh.

They would most probably increase further.

If they passed on the message that they had found us, then the soldiers who are spreading a net in other places would join in as reinforcements.

While praying that there won't be any more land dragons showing up, Merea observed the situation further.

—What's that?

Merea found some odd spots that were moving around weirdly within Müzeg's cavalry.

He noticed that it was Müzeg's soldiers densely concentrated at that spot.

Although they're moving around, he couldn't quite see what exactly they were doing.

Merea concentrated even further.

He could finally see some details.

—Are they... stabbing their spears into the ground?

At least, that was how Merea saw it.

They were crowded together and they were stabbing many spears into the ground.

Were they digging the ground up for some plan or had they hidden some sort of a beast underground?

He had a fleeting thought that maybe one of the demon lords had gotten caught which caused a chill to run down his spine but when he had looked over at the demon lords a little while back, he had confirmed that they were fine.

The number had added up properly.

While watching Mūzeg's cavalry stabbing the ground with their spears in irritation out of the corner of his eyes, Merea invoked <The Six Wings of the Wind God>.

At some point, his jump off the land dragon's back had turned into a descent and he couldn't particularly control it much but it was enough for him to reach his comrades.

Once he confirmed that, Merea once more turned his gaze towards the cavalry of Mūzeg.

As he thought, that odd action of stabbing their spears into the ground made him curious.

As a last resort, he stretched his neck out as much as possible and looked at them even more seriously.

The blade of the spears of those soldiers seemed to be covered in a [red liquid].

Is that blood?

As soon as he thought that, he felt like he saw a human hand at the place where the soldiers were stabbing their spears.

—Wh.

While thinking that it was probably his imagination, Merea felt frightened for an instant.

However, in the next moment, his altitude reduced and he could no longer see them.

In contrast to that, when he looked up front, he could see his comrades' faces clearly.



“Are you fine?!”

While moving at violent speeds with his wings of wind, Merea landed in front of the other demon lords and raised a dust cloud with his violently he landed.

When they saw Merea, the other demon lords felt one of their worries reduce but, Merea himself seemed rather flustered.

With his breath still a little rough, he restlessly looked over all the other demon lords faces.

To Merea’s question, Salman, who was close by, answered shortly.

“...Yeah”

Hearing that reply, Merea finally felt relieved and whispered, “Thank god... it was just my imagination...”

However, he also noticed something odd about Salman.

“Salman? What’s wrong?”

Although Salman had quite a few wounds on his body but there didn’t seem to be any wounds that looked fatal.

Even then, his eyes looked a little hollow.

Salman was looking over at the cavalry army of Mūzeg.
Merea copied that and looked over at them as well.

“Did the [screams] of those land dragons work?”

Maybe because of the demon lords making it through the encirclement along with Merea taking out the dragons, Mūzeg’s soldiers didn’t look like they were going to chase them anytime soon.

Although they were slowly moving closer but they themselves were moving back

slowly to combat that.

If they moved then we would too, that was the kind of situation they were in.

“...Merea, before you came here—did you see any people you’ve never seen before?”

“People I’ve never seen before?”

Merea once again tensed himself up while thinking about how they should move next when Salman glanced at him and spoke.

Merea couldn’t understand what Salman had suddenly started talking about and while tilting his neck in confusion he asked back.

“...Yeah. A little while back, I was—”

Salman looked at Merea with eyes filled with sorrow.

“『Saved』. By some soldiers who weren’t from Müzeg”

Merea hadn’t realized something like that had happened.

Since he himself was engrossed in fighting the land dragons.

When he thought about the position that they were all in, the very fact that someone they didn’t know had saved a demon lord alone was something that would cause anyone to be surprised. Salman didn’t look like he was lying either.

Merea immediately believed that story and suddenly realised something.

A certain guess cropped up in Merea’s mind.

—No way...

The moment he realised it, he felt a shiver from the very depths of his being.

Even though he had no basis for it but, in an instant he had a doubt which immediately solidified into a rough idea.

—That 『thing』 a little while back...

Salman noticed that expression on Merea’s face that looked like he realised something.

“Did you see something?”

“...”

“Did you see something?! Merea!”

There was a terrific amount of sorrow in Salman’s eyes.

Something he had never seen before, bottomless grief could be seen in his eyes.

That aloof Salman looked like he would end up crying at any moment, that was how much his eyes were quivering.

At Salman’s words, Merea got a definite answer to every question.

That was why,

“...”

He couldn’t say it.



That thing that looked like a human hand was—probably not a fake.



To help Salman get away they broke through and the person who helped a demon lord run away from Mūzeg’s soldiers was over there.

That was probably why, out of irritation, over and over again with their spears—

“—Ahhhh!! What the hell! What the hell is with that!! What the hell have we ever done?! Because of me, again just because of me!! Someone died!! Just because of this demon lord title!!! —Ahhhhhhh!!”

Salman screamed.

He most probably realized when Merea averted his gaze.

Salman was crying.

With both his hands on his hips, he desperately held his body so that he didn't kneel down in front of his enemies.

That figure was heart rending.

A scream that felt like it could cut right through his body resounded in Merea's ears.

His scream which caused Merea to start to understand the situation a little better became the trigger to change something in Merea.

The monster's fangs were trying to form into a definite shape.

Sharp, large and with a strange form--

Chapter 53

Unworthy, A king's...

“What happened to Friedman...?”

“...He died a martyr”

“...Is that so. I'm definitely going to hell”

Hasim Kudo Lemuse.

The third prince of Lemuse had set out from his country yesterday itself and was on his way to the place where the demon lords were.

What Hasim was leading at that point was the entire military of Lemuse. Only the cavalry could be seen around him and the infantry were still trying to catch up from a decent distance behind them.

There was no other choice.

Hasim didn't have enough time on his hands.

He had to make the horses run fast and catch up to the demon lords as soon as possible.

“Damn it! If that idiotic pig hadn't struggled at the end...!!”

At the present moment, Hasim was reigning over Lemuse as the temporary king.

Although it's called temporary but it's just the fact that the coronation ceremony hadn't been conducted yet and he was pretty much completely the [king].

The coup d'etat was a success.

He finally pulled his father off of that seat and with the consensus of the citizens, he himself ascended.

The measures for the coup d'etat themselves weren't really that difficult.

In Hasim's opinion, getting the three kingdoms to ally with him was considerably harder.

Most of it went according to their original plan but—just one thing.

They took an unexpected counterattack.

Even Hasim didn't expect to have such a counterattack against them from such an unexpected direction.

That made Hasim lose some of his extremely precious time.

"To think they would kill the horses...! If they are that bloody foolish then it might have been better if they thought of a garbage dump as their royal palace and lived there! What the hell do you need to think of to end up at that conclusion!"

As if not to allow things to go the way Hasim wants it, the king of Lemuse used what few subordinates he had left and had them kill off the exhausted horses in the barracks. Not to mention, they used various other methods to get his hands on as many horses as possible.

He couldn't even begin to guess the tenacity needed to do something like that nor did he know why his father had even thought of such a method.

Even the term madman would be too lukewarm for him.

"He's a pest! He is definitely a plague on this planet!!"

Hasim was obviously infuriated.

In his rage, he chopped off the arms of his father.

After that he stepped on his father's face and shouted abuses at him.

Even that wasn't enough but just at that time, a report came in.

〔Mūzeg's cavalry were spotted coming from the north〕 was what the report stated as well as,

〔The demon lords showed up from the west〕, the report stated.

Although they had been investigating as to what route the large army of Mūzeg would

take but, with some human error mixed in as well, the entire picture was more or less wrapped in a haze.

The progress report of the demon lords was the same as well.

They confirmed both those situations at the same time.

An army that was advancing while wrapped in a dust cloud, coming from the wilderness to the northwest of Lemuse.

From the west, running through the fields, having arrived considerably faster than expected, were the demon lords.

Hasim calculated the distance based on report in his mind. In addition to that, he took the speed of the two forces, that had been reported so far into account and mentally calculated their distance and time taken.

Hasim became flustered.

He became flustered for the first time.

—They're too close to Lemuse.

In other words, they're too far away from the three kingdoms.

The battlefield that Hasim had predicted was, in a very bad sense, about to come out true.

Over and above that, since the number of horses had reduced, there was a possibility that they wouldn't be able to display their fastest possible speed.

Even though they were already inferior in terms of ability but that had gone down even further.

That said, just holding his head won't make the situation any better.

Hasim immediately had swift horses dispatched and sent them to deliver messages to the three kingdoms.

〔It's fine even if your preparations are incomplete, send reinforcements immediately〕

Of course, the actual message didn't have such an impatient tone to it.

He still had to consider the promise he made to Crisca.

If Müzeg and the demon lords face each other on the battlefield then it could be a basis for arguing against his bluff during the Summit of Three Kings but, based on the situation, a certain amount of attention will need to be paid to it.

However, before such a worry about the future, if he doesn't save the demon lords now, it would be pointless.

That should be their top priority.

The situations after that would happen however it should.

While thinking that, he prayed that they had all completed their preparations and had already left their countries to provide support.

After that, Hasim himself did the preparations that were required to depart immediately.

He summoned all the military personnel he could and even called people who had already retired.

Although most of them were people who had assembled because Hasim's popularity but Hasim himself felt extremely apologetic towards them.

That was because young people like them, people of the royal family who should be in a position to protect Lemuse were calling back people of old age, who had once carried Lemuse on their backs, to once again stand on the battlefield.

Unworthy.

Completely unworthy.

Even then Hasim hardened his heart and pulled them in.

Then--



"I ended up letting them die. [This is much better than having young people die] saying stuff like that, the people who laughed, even though they themselves... in the future..."

Having heard Aisha's report, Hasim spoke with an unmistakable gloom mixed into his tone.

That might have possibly be the first time he showed such a depressed expression after having started the coup d'etat.

Hasim took the [advice] of those elderly people and sent several dozens of them ahead.

Hasim was not able to stick out for them.

In the first place, even if temporary, he was the king. The king himself going out onto the battlefield was quite the exception in itself.

However, it was already a situation where they could never have enough people and Hasim himself couldn't get himself to stay back in the current situation.

Therefore, he went towards the wilderness while being protected by a large number of soldiers.

While fixing the strange formation of Lemuse's soldiers who were clearly not used to marching in such a say, they moved as fast as possible.

At that point, the elderly soldiers laughed and spoke up.

[We'll go scout and be back, your highness. —No, it should be your majesty now huh]

Hasim first reined them in.

Aisha's subordinates had already gone out to scout.

However, the elderly soldiers shook their heads.

[Your majesty. Lady Aisha's spies won't be able to take any military actions while scouting if the situation ever called for it. In that kind of a situation, not being able to do anything could lead to matters of life and death]

Being told that straightforwardly with a strong gaze, Hasim had no choice but to nod. Although they might have never actively made it through a war but even then, as soldiers, they were excellent.

Over and above everything else, it didn't seem like they would withdraw their opinion.

[Your majesty, please teach the young soldiers some amount of strategy while you still

have time. Though the amount of time is extremely limited but it's better than not doing anything.

—Your majesty, you are excellent. Although it might be difficult for one person to handle both political warfare as well as combat but, if it's your majesty, then I believe that you'll definitely be able to manage]

Saying that, the elderly soldiers rode away on their horses.

Hasim could do nothing but to stare at their retreating backs quietly.



“Were Friedman and the rest planning on dying from the very start, I wonder?”

“No, Hasim-sama. Those people are not the type who would give their lives up on their own. If that were not the case, I doubt they could have stayed alive so long”

“That's... true... You're rather strong, Aisha”

They had only learned about the death of those people right now.

Aisha's spies had brought back information about what lay ahead.

That was also proof that the battlefield was nearby.

Although Hasim thought of trying to lighten up the mood but his body tightened up in various meanings.

“Hasim-sama..., your hand please”

At that moment, Aisha who was riding right next to Hasim with her body wrapped in the black clothes same as her other spy subordinates, noticed the oddity in Hasim. Hasim had grasped the reins with his left hand and had formed a fist with his right hand.

From inside his fist—blood could be seen dripping down.

Aisha, who brought her horse right next to Hasim's, put her hand on his fist and slowly freed each finger.

His hand, which he had gripped into a fist with an amazing amount of strength had his nails dig into his skin and the palm of his hand was soaked in blood.

“I...”

Hasim looked at Aisha's face.

There were no others around Aisha.

While he was rather unwilling, since he guessed that the report brought by Aisha's subordinate was a [negative report], so he had them move slightly further behind him.

As Hasim was someone who could divide his rationality from his emotional side, his rationality had decided that it was better for that action.

Just at that time alone did Hasim feel that, that kind of self was rather unpleasant.

After such a long time.

It's quite late now but he thought of himself as a rather cool-headed.

In this era of confusion, he had no plans of being the singular voice of absolute morality.

However, if a majority of his ethical norms were looked at seriously them he was sure to come off as a cruel man.

He thought that seriously.

At any rate, in the current situation, if he spoke in a low voice then Aisha would be the only one who would hear him.

For but a moment,

“—”

Hasim almost started whining.

He immediately noticed what he was about to do.

Hasim stopped himself in the end.

He didn't say anything, he couldn't say anything.

Since he impulsively thought of himself in a subjective manner which is why he was not able to say anything.

Aisha would definitely accept anything he has to say and would console him. However, should he really do that right now? Over and above anything else, is he in a position that is allowed to whine?

“Hasim-sama...?”

“—No, it’s nothing”

He wasn’t sure.

However, right now, that wasn’t necessary.

After several moments, he convinced himself of that.

He hasn’t been able to depart yet at all.

If they didn’t manage to overcome the battle at the end of this prelude then Lemuse wouldn’t be a country that could even raise its head in the world.

The crying and the funerals would be after everything was over.

He probably couldn’t let anyone listen to his crying though—

—You have decided so.

Hasim looked up ahead.

Finally, in the distance, he could see a mere 20 or so people facing off against several dozens of times as many people wrapped in black armour.

The black armour was the symbol of the strong nation. The people who were standing against them, in contrast were white.

Mūzeg’s color. A color similar to Lemuse.

Symbolic flag. Hair that strongly reminded you of the <White Emperor>.

That standoff was extremely reminiscent of a historical event.

The standoff between black and white was a huge event that had once taken place in the past.

At that spot, he was about to intrude bearing the white flag.

—We are both arrogant.

Hasim thought in his mind.

—However, the place that we are aiming at is different from what you are aiming for.
Which is why, I will—



Deny that arrogance.



Hasim wrapped a sharp blade around that thought and threw it at the black flag.
He then spoke a few words aimed at a certain someone.

“What are you aiming for. Since that day, now that several days have passed, will I be able to hear your answer? — [Brad] ”

Those words were said in such a low tone that the sound was lost with the galloping of the horses.

Chapter 54

He was a Hero

It had only been a few minutes since Merea and the others had gotten past Mūzeg's cavalry.

Behind them, Hasim was closing in.

The encounter would of course happen.

That would go down in history as the largest contributor to the change of the era.



When the demon lords heard footsteps coming from behind them, for a moment they felt a chill down their back thinking that Mūzeg had gone further and closed them in. However, when they turned around and looked at the people closing in on them, that doubt immediately vanished.

The ones who were approaching them weren't the oppressive black emblem of Mūzeg but were the exact opposite of them, a pure white emblem.

"That is—"

With his red eyes, Merea looked at that white flag and read the words written on it. **〔Lemuse〕**.

That was definitely written over there.

Finally, **〔he〕** had arrived.



"I'm <Hasim Kudo Lemuse>. You're the group of demon lords right?"



Bright brown coloured hair that was closer to orange.

Crystal clear aqua blue pupils like that of the southern ocean.

Though he looked fearless but his good looks gave a certain neutral feeling to it.

With the name of the famous country as part of his name, that man gazed strongly back without any hesitation.

The one who was standing in front of that man, was Merea.

Merea felt slightly dumbfounded as he kept staring at the white emblem and spoke softly.

“—Lemuse”

“That’s right”

Hasim kept staring at Merea

For Hasim, Merea’s white hair brought up some very deep emotions.

A moment later, their eyes met.

Merea who had lowered his gaze from the emblem and Hasim who had lowered his gaze from Merea’s hair had their gazes meet.

In the next instant,

“__”

There was [something] inside both of them that moved.

That movement immediately changed into a large vibration and at the end, changed into an electric current that ran from the top of their heads down to the tips of their feet.

At that moment, the exact same words floated up in both their minds.

— I feel like, I know about him.

It was like a resonance.

The same genes in them seemed to resonate with each other.

For but an instant, they both continued to look at the [something] in each other, with the feeling like time had stopped.

“...I’m <Merea Mea>. I don’t know if I myself am called a demon lord or not but, my comrades definitely are called by that name”

Merea spoke first.

“—Ah, got it”

Hasim nodded deeply with a serious expression.

He then turned his gaze towards the other side, towards the cavalry of Mūzeg.

“...Serius isn’t there huh”

Hasim immediately spoke.

“How can you tell?”

“If Serius was there, he would have attacked us in no time. Even during a decisive battle like this time, he wouldn’t waste any time on strategy formation or command formation and would take control of the situation while fighting”

While speaking, Hasim looked back at his subordinates behind him.

Lemuse’s cavalry definitely didn’t look bad.

The way they hold up their weapons goes to show that they were veteran soldiers. However, Hasim himself knew exactly how much of a bluff that gallant appearance was.

Even so, Hasim felt extremely proud when he saw how proudly and defiantly his

soldiers were facing off against Müzeg's army.

"However, if Serius isn't here then that's convenient for us. We'll use the time they're taking to form their strategy. It's not long since we met but—"

Hasim looked over at Merea.

"I'll save you demon lords. We, Lemuse, shall from this point forth revolt against Müzeg. We shall fight against this very era that they have created"

The demon lords finally understood everything.

Why were they saved by the cavalrymen a little while back.

Why did those men try to help them.

Lemuse was trying to resist the torrential flow of the era that Müzeg had created with [demon lord hunting].

They first relied on them.

When they succeeded, they praised them.

Next they desired it.

At first they made puppets of them but then they forced them in the end.

And now.

They the thing that they had created at their own convenience, they now tried to restrict at their own convenience.

Whether it be heroes or demon lords, they were all shaped based on people's expectations.

It was almost as if they were items.

However, both heroes and demon lords were... alive.

Müzeg who ignored that fact. The others who were swept by their coercion and pledge allegiance to them.

However, there was a fool who would go against that torrential flow of the era.

He finally found that out.



“Make a wall ahead of us as well! It’s the first fight of the decisive battle! This war of attrition during this strategy time definitely can’t be handled by an idiot! Also, if the enemy moves, tell me immediately!”

Hasim briskly ordered his subordinates and, getting off from his horse, brought his line of sight to the same level as the demon lords.

“Let’s hear the situation”, he asked.

Merea was the one who answered that question.

“We have at least managed to escape from a complete encirclement so far”

“Perfect. It’s amazing you managed that with such few numbers”

After being told that, Hasim purposefully complimented them.

“—Oi, wait a second... Is that a land dragon?”

With a dubious expression, he stretched his back and looked over at the item on the other side.

They were the remains of a land dragon with no head.

Not to mention, he could hear faint roars from the distance at times.

They were roars that sounded like moans.

“There were three land dragons”

“Well, one of them doesn’t have a head though”

“I killed it. I cut off the legs of the other two”

“...Alone?”

“That’s right”

Hasim, who almost said, "I really can't think of you as being the same human as me" forcefully stopped himself from speaking out loud.

He was well aware that his face clearly showed his astonishment. He forcefully fixed himself and started talking about that topic from a different angle.

"...Mūzeg has finally started bringing out some truly outrageous things. That rumour was true after all it seems.

But, how did the manage to get their hands on it? Did they plunge into a group and kidnap them...? I seriously can't figure out their method"

Hasim placed a hand on his chin and whispered thoughtfully.

"Unless it's a situation where the group would themselves abandon those dragons—"

At Hasim's words, Merea reflexively answered.

Since he had heard about something like that quite recently.

"—Fatal draconic disease"

"—I see. If it's the fatal draconic disease then they would abandon the dragons due to the fear of contracting the disease but, if that was the case then the dragon which contracted the disease would die soon... no, that's not possible..."

In the next instant, Hasim groaned.

As if he had quite the confidence in his own guess, he spoke with a strong tone.

"Did they derive the cure for the fatal draconic disease...?"

As a possibility, it wasn't zero.

On the contrary, it felt like the facts weren't consistent if that wasn't true.

The reason why a group would abandon an individual.

Not to mention, the reason why the prideful dragons would obey Mūzeg to that extent.

While land dragons were prideful but they also had a strong sense of duty. They were

quite conscientious.

In the case that the dragons who had contracted the fatal draconic disease were saved by the cure created by Mūzeg then—

“The possibility is definitely there. Mūzeg would definitely monopolize the cure... Damn it! The troublesome things have increased again”

Hasim suppressed his urge to cradle his head and then he straightened his collar.

“It’s fine right now. Let’s just think about the things we need to do right now”

He brought his attention back and looked around the surroundings. The gaze, of course, had gone after the various demon lords.

With just a glance there were many who he could tell what titles they held and still many he couldn’t tell anything about.

He also noticed that they were divided into people who were depressed and those who still had a positive outlook.

The scene was rather impressive.

He intuitively guessed as to what caused such a thing to occur.

As if to answer that guess of his, Merea spoke up.

“Tell me something. ——The men who saved us a little while back, were they your subordinates?”

“...That’s right”

While answering calmly, he watched the demon lords grip their hands into fists.

“In that case, let me tell you”

Merea looked at Hasim with his clear red eyes and spoke up.

“For us, those men were [heroes]”

“...Ah”

After hearing Merea's words, Hasim noticed a man wiping his eyes standing next to Merea. It was Salman.

Seeing that figure, Hasim figured something out.

"They were... heroes for me too"

Hasim looked down a little while he spoke.

"—Is that so"

"However, mourning them will have to wait. —We will definitely mourn them. For that sake as well, we need to fight now"

Hasim immediately returned his gaze back to their faces.

"Although the situation is like this, since it's a serious matter, I'll ask you all right now"

Hasim spoke in a tone that could easily be heard by all the demon lords.

"Can you all, fight alongside Lemuse? Can you fight alongside Lemuse on the [battlefield]?"

They didn't answer immediately.

They were measuring the weight of those words.

"I'll show you that I can save him. That's why, you guys save his highness"

The demon lords recalled the words of that old man.

They chewed through the meaning of those words.

This wasn't a unilateral contract.

It was instead a bilateral contract where, [they help each other].



One of them took a step forward.

"We were aiming for Lemuse from the very beginning. Those are words that are

definitely something that we had wished to hear. Over and above that, we have already been saved by Lemuse once. Those people gave up their lives to save up, which is something we could never forget. ——However”

It was Elma.

With her black hair waving in the wind, she stood in front of the majestic Hasim without flinching and even spoke words that could be considered insulting.

“With all that in mind, I shall still ask. ——I apologize for my rudeness. Even then, this is an extremely important matter for us”

“It’s fine. Speak freely, descendent of the family of Elisa”

When he noticed the sword that she was holding in one hand, Hasim immediately understood her title.

One of the seven emperors who held seven imperial weapons, the <Sword Emperor>.

Elma, on the other hand, after having received Hasim’s permission, slightly raised her sword and pointed it towards his face and spoke.

“Will you people not betray us?”

Hasim’s subordinates had already given up their lives to save the demon lords.

She knew exactly how [insulting] those words were despite that happening.

Even so, Elma knew exactly how frightening the term demon lord was which is why she couldn’t get herself to do it half-heartedly.

It could also have been for the other demon lord’s sake.

Elma herself had already decided to fight. Without worrying about the small difficult things, if the battlefield was in front of her then she would fight. Having inherited the habits of certain ephemeral warriors, she could answer immediately to Hasim’s question.

However, the other demon lords who had seen the [dangerous parts of a person] many times already, without having any solid basis they couldn’t believe Hasim immediately which is probably why they couldn’t answer immediately either.

That was how deep the darkness that demon lords hid inside themselves was.

They probably wouldn't have to think too deeply if it had been people who were in the same circumstances as them.

However, Hasim was the representative of a country.

Even if the Lemuse of the past was known for helping demon lords but in this era, the current Lemuse was a different country.

The important aspect was the current Lemuse.

Which is why Elma, in place of those who were unsure of how to phrase their thoughts, asked that question to Hasim.

“I shall pledge. We shall never betray you”

Hasim answered immediately.

“This is an [equal] negotiation. Those were my intentions when I came here. ——It's pointless if it's not equal. Which is, it's fine if you guys abandon the talks as well. In any case, we're both in the same boat”

Hasim answer was rather refreshingly frank.

“Of course, I do realise that it's rather suspicious. Even so, I feel that this is the best course of action. Which is why, I won't lower my head either”

He spoke with conviction.

Hasim won't lower his head.

At Hasim's words——

“——Got it”

Someone spoke up.

In the middle of that speech, the demon lords had lifted their heads.

As if they had found something in those words that they could believe, they looked deeply into his aqua blue pupils.

Seeing that the demon lords had raised their heads, Elma gave a satisfied nod.

“—Let’s fight”

The demon lords had, for the first time, decided to risk their lives on the battlefield.

In reality, their legs were shaking.



Merea was not the only one.

Everyone was scared.

Most of the demon lords were aware that they were weaker than the [demon lords of old].

The evil demon lords of old, the heroes who were later called as demon lords and demon lords who actively participated in the turning point of the era were all overwhelmingly strong.

However, those strong demon lords were, as time passed, hunted down as a priority.

It would have been dangerous to leave them be and they were all extremely strong which is why they tried to fight back.

That strength though was not that useful in the end as the countries that were not antagonistic to them and still had some relations were the ones who ended up hunting these strong demon lords down.

With the turning of the age, the demon lords were weeded out as well.

As the demon lords weakened, the countries antagonized them even further. They stopped seeing demon lords as a higher existence.

[It’s fine even if we let them be for now huh]

〔More importantly, the neighboring country is making some strange movements〕
〔We should really take care of them first〕.

However, the fact that the demon lords powers were precious was something that did not change. The hunting still continued.

At that point, the demon lords were akin to tools.

After that, the ones who stood out or the ones who shone brightly were successively hunted.

As a result, the ones who were left were either the strong 〔clever〕 ones who managed to make it through or... the weak demon lords.

Although they're called weak but they still have the aptitude. It was just that they lacked the environment required to polish that aptitude of theirs for the sake of battle but they without a doubt had the genes required to become strong enough to survive in the current age.

Since they themselves understood this well, they could somehow accept the reason behind Mūzeg and the other countries only going after the secret arts passed down among the demon lords' families.

Though the demon lords themselves might be weak but the secret arts passed down in their families which the previous generations spent many long years perfecting could, if used properly, bring forth tremendous power.

Although they were disappointed with the situation where they were demanded for the theory behind their secret arts but there were some who even thought that they would be able to save their lives if they handed over the secret arts.

However, that pale hope was completely scattered when they saw the way that Mūzeg conducted its demon lord hunting but, there was no one who had the courage to resist from the front.

They didn't want to kill or be killed.

It turned out this way simply because they were born with such a name.

They wanted to throw it away.

Even so, they were unable to throw it away.

It was like a [curse] from their ancestors.

The long years that their ancestors spent accumulating experience and research, the glories of the past, the emotions therein, when they faced those head on, they couldn't get themselves to get rid of it.

If they could still get rid of it, then it would be fine.

Though, now that they had everything engraved on their own bodies, there was no way to throw them away anymore.

If they had thought of things more carefully, there might have been some other way to handle it.

However, by the time they noticed it, they were already being chased.

So they ran.

They ran like their lives depended on it.

When they saw the eyes of those people which looked at them as if they were objects made them sure that there was nothing they could do but to run.

If they could have been without feeling anything then they wouldn't have run so much.

They would have given up and would have withered away on some battlefield.

The reason they ran was—because they felt scared.

Such people, when faced with a country that was trying to treat them equally, made a decision.

They were also tired of running.

Even if they ran any more, the situation probably wouldn't improve much.

They had no choice but to stand up now, hate others when needed, love others when it was called for or else they would end up disgracing the name that they have shouldered so long.

They had various reasons that they had whirling inside their minds but, they all decided to fight.

Also.

The one who felt fear more than anyone else, the man who turned that into a strong will—made a certain decision.



Slipping down a slimy, soft bottomless swamp and in the next moment he found himself standing on a battlefield.

For Merea, that was the kind of feeling he had.

Although his body had made the preparations to fight but his insides seemed to be floating around somewhere.

However, that fluttering spirit of his, with a certain piece as the trigger, was trying to fix itself to a certain point.

Salman's grief stricken howl still lingered in his ears.,

—Is that so.

Merea knew.

That wasn't awareness.

It isn't something he himself had realised but rather it was something that he was forcefully made to realise.

—Will I be able to throw my life away?

For Merea, what affected him the most wasn't the fact that he and the other demon lords were being chased or that their lives were being targeted.

He had already noticed that during the situation that happened on that sacred mountain and had somehow accepted it.

However, the stuff that happened a moment ago made him understand the difference in this world even more.

—Is this the kind of world where people who don't even know me, would throw their lives away for me?

For their cause, those people died trying to save people they hadn't even spoken to once.

For Merea, that was the event that caused the largest impact on him.

At that moment, the world that Merea had been seeing cracked.

He felt like he could hear the sound of the glass covering his world cracking.

From the other side of the broken glass, he could see a world with solid colours.

It was as if his world which was black and white till then suddenly had various colours.

Merea felt like his body was being restructured.

It felt like his old body was falling apart and withered away.

Along with the scene in front of him being full of colours, this time he felt like something was overflowing from deep within himself, all the way from his soul.

That kept stacking up and it seemed to wrap around his soul like flesh.

Crackling

Such a sound could be heard.

He suddenly felt like he could see his old self's remains at his feet.

Those remains had a rather nostalgic air around them.

Past life.

The [himself] from his previous world.

The remains were white.

With absolutely no other colours, it was stark white.

Gray coloured remains scattered over it.

The monster of the sacred mountain of Lindholm.

The existence that couldn't exist anywhere else but there, a half-hearted existence that was hard to tell whether it had any colours or not.

He looked at his hand.

His current body had the colour of skin.

This was his current self.

Most probably, this is his current self who is trying to live in the current world.

—White and gray are both my colours.

However, right now he was extremely happy that he was able to get this current flesh colour.

Thinking that, he finally faced forward.

He could see a wave of black armoured people on the other side.

Mūzeg.

Merea, at that time, resolved himself.



That resolution—caused the demon god to grow fangs.



The trigger that caused the monster to grow fangs was neither his comrade's words or his comrade's death nor was it any danger he himself faced.

Instead, it was the [death] of someone who he didn't even know but could be

considered the most vivid person and possibly the symbol of the current world.

Chapter 55

Child of the Heroic Spirits

At some point, Merea found all the demon lords standing in front of him, with their backs to him.

As if they were trying to protect the one who they relied on till now.

Seeing them like that, Merea couldn't help but smile lightly.
It was a smile of pure happiness.

That smile stayed on his face for a short while then disappeared.
What showed on his face now, was a warrior's expression of strong determination.

"In that case, I'll stand in the frontlines once more. In front of my comrades who have decided to fight, I'll stand in front of them once more.

This is my pride as well as my preparedness as a hero that I vowed to my family"

Merea's shadow fell deeply on the earth.
There was no longer any emptiness or fragility in it.
His expression seemed to have a clear outline to it.

"Hasim"

Merea continued talking and asked Hasim a question.

"We will do what we can do so—please lend us a hand"

"Yeah, that's what I came here for"

"Do you swear on Leilas Lif Lemuse?"

"...You know about her?"

Hasim was rather surprised at the name that suddenly popped up.

“She was one of my family members. Though, she had already passed on by the time I was aware of myself though”

“A heroic spirit... huh?”

So they did exist. Hasim thought that with a strange sense of certainty. It was probably because Merea had the same white hair as Leilas.

“Is Hasim one of Leilas’ descendants?”

“Nope. Princess Leilas never had any children”

“Ahh, now that you mention it, they did say something like that”

“I’m a descendant of Princess Leilas’ sister. My hair and eye color are something that I inherited from her sister.

—Well, other than me all the other royal family members had different hair and eye colors so this is probably something that happened by coincidence”

Hasim touched his hair lightly and for, but a moment, he remembered his other siblings but he quickly got rid of that image.

“Even then, I have decided to inherit the pride of the hero of Lemuse, the <White Emperor> Leilas.

Which is why, I swear. On that white hair”

“Yeah”

Hasim had thoughts whirling inside him as he looked at Merea.

Those feelings are like a child’s dream, uninhibited and without any basis but even so, Hasim believed it.

The existence known as Merea was probably one of the last things left behind by Leilas— [Hope].

“...It’s such a strange story. I thought that it was just a fairy tale, that’s how strange this is. I want to ask you various things in detail but—”

“We don’t really have the time to be that relaxed after all huh”

“Yeah”

He looked over at the other side of the wilderness from in between the gaps of the wall created by his subordinates.

The wave of Mūzeg’s soldiers could be making slight movements.

“—Shall we do it?”

At Hasim’s words, along with Merea, all the other demon lords nodded as well.

“I’ll give instructions. If there are any people who have experience on battlefields, then I’ll take your opinions into account as well. In any case, we’ll hold the line here. The reinforcements from the three kingdoms will join us in time. Until then, let’s endure together”

No matter the sacrifices, they would hold out there.

That is the kind of resolution that Hasim had but he didn’t say it out loud.

However, Hasim’s subordinates understood it.

In order not to let the demon lords die in this place, they would most probably have to risk their lives.

This was currently a turning point for history.

They would become the cornerstone for that.

When they thought that they would only be able to face destruction under that foolish king, hope flared up and engulfed them.

It was a fire that could engulf life.

However, in Lemuse, they didn’t flinch in the face of such a fire.

They worked hard to make sure it burned brighter.

—It would burn life.



Their tension rose.

The other side was gradually setting up their formation. Although there were no large

movements yet but it was quite clear that command and strategy formations were progressing well.

As if following that, Hasim's side also started setting up their formations with Hasim as the central figure.

In particular, Hasim spent his time finding out the abilities of the demon lords.

At that time,

“Hasim”

“What is it?”

Merea spoke to Hasim.

“You seem to know quite a lot about Serius Brad Mūzeg huh?”

The moment he had arrived at the current location, Hasim had seen through the fact that Serius wasn't among the enemies.

Those words still revolved inside Merea's mind.

“Ah, there's a connection between us”

“In that case, there's something that I want to ask you”

Merea spoke with a serious expression.

“What is it?”

“For ease of explanation, I'll tell you beforehand but—I have a weakness”

Merea's conversation started with such a confession.

“You have a weakness? You, who uses the great techniques of the heroic spirits?”

While setting up the command formations, Hasim had already gotten a rough idea of Merea's abilities.

At that time, he found out that Merea could use the abilities of the heroic spirits who

used to come out in hero stories of the past, especially the great techniques which were the symbols of their powers.

Since he did have a strange conviction earlier, he wasn't too surprised when he was told that but, he was quite surprised when he found out that Merea could use them [simultaneously].

"I still can't seem to wrap my head around you being able to use the techniques of the <Lightning God> and the <Wind God> simultaneously though"

"That in itself is my weakness"

Merea shook his head.

"I don't have an [interim]"



"An interim?"

Hasim tilted his head in confusion.

He couldn't quite understand what Merea was trying to say.

"Why do you think the lightning god and the wind god got those titles? It's because they were specialists in those fields. Techniques are originally flexible and the great techniques that are left behind for their [fame] are not the only ones"

"That's true. All the ones who were of the natural phenomenon system could use any type of technique in their respective fields skillfully"

"However, I only managed to inherit a few of their techniques"

Hasim finally got an inkling of what the conversation was about.

It was definitely not possible to easily acquire the magnificent techniques that those heroic spirits spent long years developing.

The moment he thought that,

“Wait, how old are you?”

He suddenly thought of that after all this time and impulsively asked him.

“Since my birth was rather special so it’s a little ambiguous but, it probably hasn’t even been twenty years since I was born in this world”

“Twen—”

Hearing that answer, Hasim couldn’t help but have his voice become slightly hoarse.

“You acquired so many techniques in less than twenty years...?!”

It was extraordinary.

It was not normal.

He thought that it might be possible that he looked young but he was actually a considerably old man based on the heretical nature of his birth but it somehow seemed like his age was as his looks suggested.

That instead caused Hasim to feel an extreme sense of astonishment.

“From my perspective, it feels more like I could [only] acquire this much. The compilation of the technique systems that they created is all included in these inscribed major techniques that they left behind. That’s why they had me learn these techniques before anything else”

“Isn’t the order reversed? Isn’t it normal to first start with the foundation and then—”

“There was no time. They, themselves, were troubled being in the gap between regrets and sublimation”

Hasim recalled the disposition of the souls of the dead that were said to live on the sacred mountain of Lindholm.

“If it’s put another way then it could be said that I’m not exactly too bright”

“If someone actually managed to acquire all the techniques of all the heroic spirits as you mentioned earlier, in around twenty years then that person is no longer human.

—They're probably something similar to god”

Hasim said with a serious face.

Even so, Merea shrugged his shoulders.

“Even though I'm able to use their inscribed techniques, I've still not become able to properly use the simple accompanying attribute techniques yet. That's why, I don't have an interim. Thanks to that, my magic power efficiency is quite bad and my attacks are also rather straightforward”

Rather than about Merea having such a tender weakness, instead,

—Even like this... he's still developing?

He was astonished by that fact.

“If I had a [sense for techniques] at the same level as Flander Crow then I could have probably acquired them immediately. But, I just don't seem to have the same sense as the <Technique God>”

“The title of <Technique God> is something that hasn't been given to a single person since Flander Crow died. That position is still vacant. —In other words, Flander Crow was extremely abnormal. He was the type of man where it's even doubtful if even one person like him would be born once in a few hundred years, the so-called aberrant genius.

The person you're trying to compare yourself to is the wrong choice”

At Hasim's words, Merea laughed with a happy expression.

“That's right, Flander was amazing. I was taught quite a few things by Flander but, not once could I catch up to his compositional power or his creativity. —However”

Even though Merea was like that, one part of him still had the ability to surpass even Flander.

“This is something that I was told by Flander himself but it seems that I'm skilled at processing many techniques simultaneously”

“True, that in itself is a talent in techniques huh”

“That sort of a reason was there as well and we didn’t know how long the heroic spirits could stay in this world so after I had the basic theory drilled into me, I suddenly had the finished technique taught to me. Those were the inscribed major techniques.

Though i mentioned it earlier but, those completed techniques have the the long years of research and development that the heroic spirits spent doing engraved into them. So, if you knew the completed techniques then it’s possible to unravel it and get to that research and to gain that interim”

“That’s just insane. There’s a limit to the order of things being reversed. Techniques are a rite. Without understanding the basic theory for derivation, is it even possible to memorise those sorts of techniques that are so insanely complicated and huge that it wouldn’t even fit onto the humongous wall of the royal palace?”

As expected, Hasim couldn’t really believe it.

He himself had a chance to see one of those inscribed techniques of a certain demon lord and the complexity of it made him dizzy in no time making him quit trying to learn it. In the first place, he wasn’t even able to decipher it much at all.

“I memorised it though”

“...How exactly?”

“Even if you ask me how, it’s not something that can be easily put into words. If I say it in very simple terms then—with a stupidly huge amount of training. With teachers who were like demons being next to me at all times”

“Is it even something that can be solved with training?”

“How many years do you think I spent cooped up on that sacred mountain, spending time day in and day out simply for [this sake]. I wasn’t holed up, isolated from the outside world for show you know”

Merea shrugged his shoulders and replied with a disappointingly simple reply.



As Hasim had said, if someone who had a genius sense similar to Flander did not appear then it was near impossible to acquire the theories of the technique systems, created by those heroic spirits, in twenty years.

The techniques that were developed, taking several years by people who were considerably more outstanding than ordinary people, were acquired... not just one but several of them.

If someone was capable of that, then they would be infinitely closer to being gods.

Not to mention, they all realised that the heroic spirits could disappear at any moment. Merea's existence was like a bright light that would clear away the regrets that had piled up.

If it's seen from another angle, the number of heroic spirits were also a lot.

The amount of time each one could spend with Merea was limited.

At that time, the method that they came up with was to first cram the technique with all the theory of their abilities engraved in it into Merea and then have him unravel it later.

In the first place, it's quite insane to make him memorise, as Hasim calls it, [techniques that are so insanely complicated and huge that it wouldn't even fit onto the humongous wall of the royal palace] without teaching him the supporting theory first.

However, since they thought that it was the only way, they put that plan into action.

Simply because of their insane policy,



Merea had to endure training that could push people off the edge.



The [inscribed techniques] that Merea was shown by the spirits in the past had definitely been a considerably complicated pattern of drawings to him.

It was rather obvious that he would want to run away from the sacred mountain when he was told to memorise them all.

If he knew the meanings of each detail of the drawing then it would still have been fine but as far as Merea was concerned, this was no different than the leaves on a tree.

Just like, if he was told to recall those leaves of the tree and not being able to, Merea wasn't able to memorise the details of the techniques at all.

However, even then, Merea did not give up.

When he heard the heroic spirits proudly talk about their treasure, something that they seemed to value as much as themselves, he somehow wanted to make sure that it was left behind in the world. (*TLN: Treasure here refers to the techniques that the spirits spent their lifetimes researching and developing*)

Afterwards, Merea spent day after day, drilling those techniques into himself.

On top of that, he watched and copied and repeated that same act over and over again, until it felt like he would go completely crazy.

It was no longer a deed as lukewarm as memorising techniques anymore. Let alone see it in his dreams, even when his eyes were open he could visualise them.

Then, finally, Merea managed to engrave it into his mind.

That was indeed a difficult task was like memorising an entire maze that was drawn on the humongous wall of the royal castle without missing a single dead end or turning.

As a result of that, Merea had to do something extreme like staying still for long periods, without being allowed to move at all and then suddenly moving at 200 Km/Hr.

It was a situation that brought to mind a child that, rather than crawling and then moving onto walking on two legs and then running, just skipped all of that and started off with flying instead.

It's possible that the [you have nice talent] that the heroic spirits had once said was not only referring to the extreme level of aptitude that Merea had displayed but also

mainly referring to him having managed to complete an insane level of training. In other words, [a tribute to his humanity].

After that, Merea was able to invoke those inscribed techniques simultaneously, thanks to his large amount of magic power as well as his processing capabilities which even surpassed Flander.

Merea was the complete opposite to a normal person.

He acquired the completed technique before he even touched the basics.

If he knew the basics then he would be able to move gradually from one point in the techniques to the next as if following a painting.

That reaction was because he didn't understand the theory in the [interim] of the technique, in other words, [a lack of flexibility].



“—Wait, you said that you could use the [Reversal Technique] of the <Technique God> right? Isn't that something that can't be used unless the person had at least as much natural sense for techniques as Flander Crow?”

“Ahh, although my reversal technique and Flander's reversal technique are similar but they're [different]”

At Hasim's question, Merea once again shook his head and replied.

“My reversal technique is a [reflexive] reversal technique whereas Flander's reversal technique is a [cognitive] reversal technique. In other words, when I use the reversal technique, I don't particularly think of anything much”

“That's absurd. You don't think? What do you mean by you don't think of anything?”

“No well, it's a reflex. The process of thinking has basically been removed. That's how I was taught by Flander and the rest”

There's something wrong with him. Hasim thought that in his mind.

“Don't you ever have those moments when you think, [I've seen this somewhere before].”

—Well that is still better. There's no need to completely memorise the details and there are many situations where it feels like things would work out on its own somehow or the other. More than anything—with these eyes, I can actually see the completed pattern”

Merea pointed at his red eyes.

<Magic eyes of the Technique God>.

Eyes that could unravel any technique.

The moment Merea looks at an opponent's technique with those eyes, he skips over the process of thinking about it and reflexively understands and creates a reversal technique to combat it.

It was a partly automatic technique creation that came from experience.

Although that is something that Flander had taught him but in reality, even as his teacher, Flander himself had no idea what how that even worked.

With Flander at the forefront, the heroic spirits who belonged to the technique systems, took the time they had before they crossed over to heaven and attacked Merea with various techniques.

The number of techniques that Merea had already seen with his own eyes had reached such a large number that even if the libraries of technique system books over multiple countries were combined, it still wouldn't reach that number.

Not to mention, he also had Flander show him the reversal techniques for all those techniques as well.

Of course, Merea had not rationally memorised any of those techniques.

However, since he had such a strange level of specialised experiences, he gradually developed a [peculiar sense].

He [somehow] felt that a particular technique system could be countered with another particular technique system.

Moreover, he even had the same happen when it came to patterns where he felt certain patterns would combat certain other patterns.

In the end, [he couldn't explain it with words].

"In that case, don't you need to see the opponents techniques till the very end? You can't use combat reversal techniques against the enemy by figuring out in advance what they'll attack with—"

"That's true, if it was Flander then he could complete his reversal technique if he saw just 50% of the technique. It gets even more amazing when he even manages to add improvements to the original. I can't do something like that.

—However, if I saw 80% to 90% of the technique then my reflex takes over and activates"

"Can you even make it on time like that?"

Starting off after the opponent has completed 90% of their technique and then,

"I'd make it on time"

Merea answered lightly.

When it comes to the construction speed, Merea's abilities were definitely outside the norm.

"As long as the opponent is not Flander, I'll catch up to them"

"If the opponent is not the technique god then you can catch up to them? So you're basically saying that, in this world where there is no technique god, you're the fastest?"

"No, if we started at the same time, I think I'm faster than Flander. Flander told me to be [proud] of that fact so I plan on speaking about it without humility though.

"Faster... than the technique god... How many times has it been? [There's something wrong with him]"

Although he understood that there was a battlefield spreading in front of him, he still threw both his hands up in the air. —He couldn't help but throw his hands up in the air.

"In place of that, to allow processing power for the reversal technique, the techniques

of the heroic spirits that I could use simultaneously are at most two. —That's my weakness”

“How many humans do you think exist that can even figure out such a weakness? If I have the time, I'll count them and let you know... since they could probably be counted rather easily”

“But, Serius Brad Müzeg—”

Hasim finally realised what Merea had been trying to say.

When he realised it, he immediately replied.

Hasim had an answer to that.

“...Ah. ——He'd notice it. Not to mention, he'd even attack it”

“As I thought— that's how it is huh”

“At the very least, I'm completely certain that he would notice it”

After saying that, Hasim continued.

“By the way, this is my personal opinion but, as far as pure power is concerned when it comes to physical as well as technique abilities, Merea is probably stronger. Serius is definitely a genius when it comes to those things, being a few steps ahead of an ordinary person but still not as much as you.

However, even then, that guy is [skillful]. His skill in battle reaches godly levels. Due to that, even if he loses when it comes to abilities but I still have this strange conviction that he'll figure out and aim at Merea's weakness”

While looking down, Merea nodded a little.

He himself had expected that reply from Hasim to some extent.

“If it's possible, I definitely wanted you to take Serius' head but when you think about it, that's too dangerous huh”

Hasim decided after seeing Merea's condition.

Although he couldn't say with certainty that his image of Serius wasn't at least a little exaggerated but unless there was a large possibility of victory, he couldn't send Merea there.

“In the first place, this is all with the assumption that Serius would actually show up but will he really come here? Though he seems to have been seen near the sacred mountain of Lindholm but that’s too shallow a reason to believe that he’ll have chased us down here”

The one who joined their conversation was Elma.

She walked towards the two from the side and while stabbing the demon sword into the ground, she tilted her head.

“He’ll come. It really bothers me that he tamed land dragons”

Hasim once more looked over at the corpse of the land dragon.

“There were no land dragons when we saw him near the sacred mountain you know? Though, that might just have been because, at the time, he was only chasing after me”

“Yeah. If you think about it in another way, using land dragons for just one person isn’t really needed. Those three land dragons must have been quite precious to them”

Hasim moved his gaze from the land dragon and continued speaking while looking over at Elma.

“However, Serius found out that there were a large group of demon lords on the sacred mountain. If it’s to chase after such a group then it’s extremely possible that he would call for land dragons from his country. Not to mention—”

Hasim continued speaking in a way that seemed like he was joking.

“He has a good nose. It’s almost as if there’s a god of war—No, a demon of war that’s guiding him, making him follow the scents of battle. I have no logic behind this though”

Elma on the other hand felt like that baseless logic stabbed into her.

Since she had been through many battlefields, she already knew that there were races like that.

“...There are some like that. Without intending, they keep moving through battlefields... Is that so, if that’s the case—he might actually show up here. In which

case, it's dangerous to have Merea face off with him huh”

“Nope”

The one who denied Elma's words was Merea himself.

His eyes that were looking down had been raised at some point and were looking over at Hasim.

“That may be the very reason why I have a chance to create an opening in Serius”



“I have a way to limitedly overturn my weakness”



Since Merea had faced, what he knew was a weakness from the front, he was able to come up with a countermeasure for it.

In other words, it was something hidden quite inside the weakness.

If it wasn't someone who had reached this point, then they wouldn't be able to even see that sort of a trump card.

In Merea's eyes, a strong will to fight was shining.



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